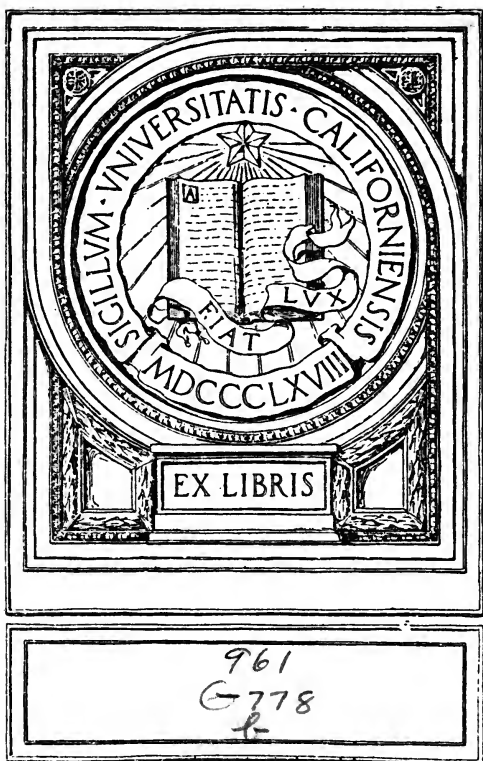


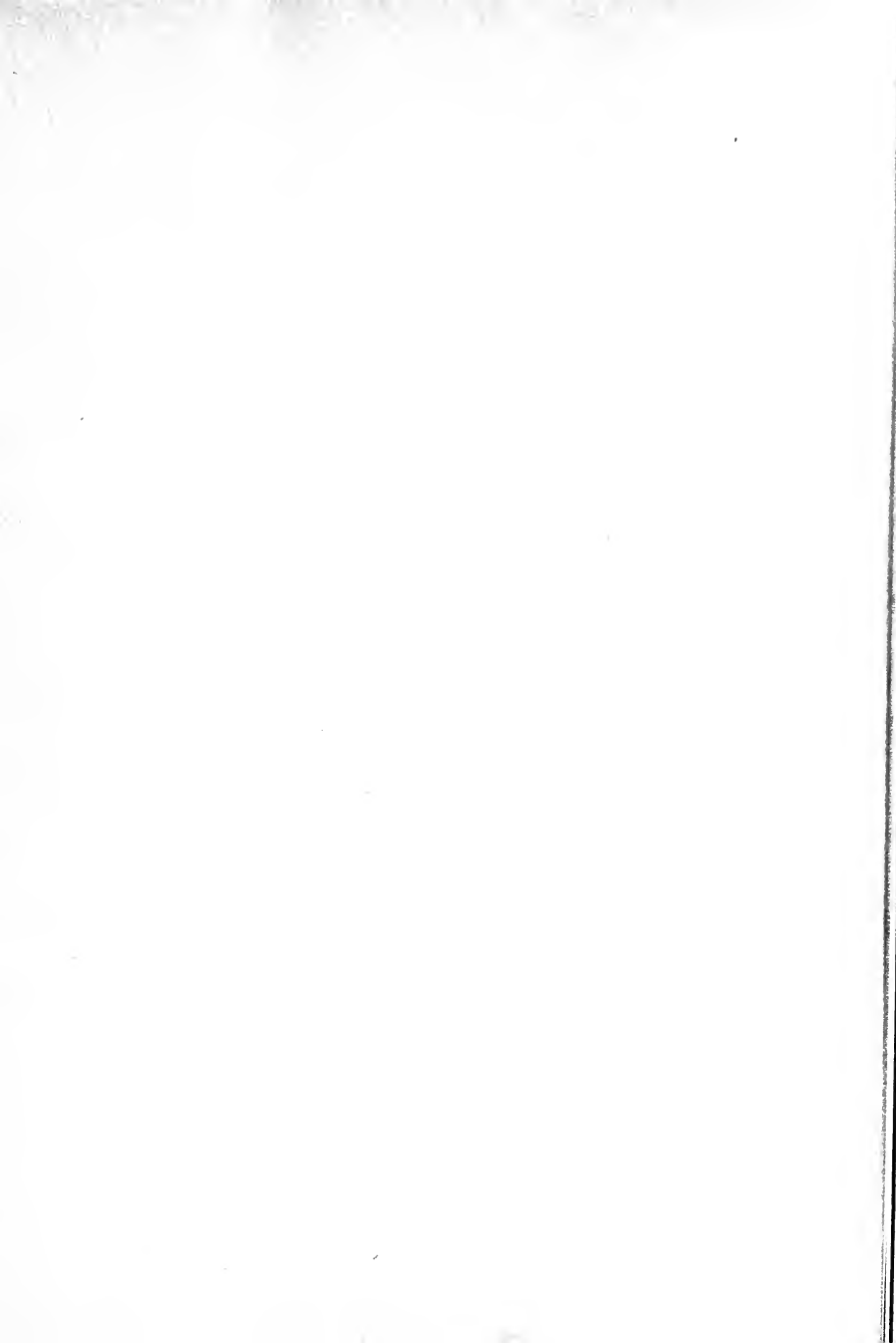
The Boomerang

David Gray









THE BOOMERANG



A girl, slim and young, was standing timidly before him

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THE BOOMERANG

A NOVEL BASED ON THE PLAY
OF THE SAME NAME

BY
DAVID GRAY
Author of "Gallops I," "Gallops
II," "Mr. Carteret," etc.

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PART I

THE BOOMERANG

CHAPTER I

AS the crowd streamed from the train to the Flüelen steamboat landing a voice shouted in the speech of the Vierwaldstätter and, receiving no response, shouted again. Now the speech of the four cantons is said to resemble High German of the twelfth century, but on that account it is not more intelligible.

Among those upon whose ears the station official's remarks fell were three young men. As to Mr. Marchbanks and the Hon. Augustus Mildway, these utterances might as well have been made in Choctaw. However, they were normally curious young men.

"Jerry," said Marchbanks, appealing to the third member of the party, "what is the fellow trying to say? Is it anything to eat or drink?"

"No," replied Jerry. "Come along."

Now this answer on the part of the third young man addressed as Jerry was a proper enough an-

swer. It was truthful. It was to the point. There were a limited number of seats on the boat, and what seemed the entire floating population of summer Switzerland aimed to be seated in them. It was reasonable that if they did not "come along" they would have to make the voyage to Lucerne standing. Yet something either in Jerry's tone or manner stirred a suspicion in the minds of his companions.

The station official's shouting was repeated. Mildway stopped.

"I'm going to find out about this," he said. "We may be missing something." He addressed the porter who was bearing his kit-bag.

"Somebody is sick," said the porter in English. "They want a doctor."

Jerry's face showed exasperation. Mildway grinned and seized one of Jerry's arms.

"So that's it!" he said.

"Of course you've got to take the case," said Marchbanks, gravely.

"It's his Æsculapian oath," said Mildway. "We're morally responsible."

"Stop your nonsense," said Jerry.

Obviously here was a potential case of "Le médecin malgré lui." There was no doubt what Jerry intended to do. Æsculapian oath or no

Æsculapian oath, he was going to get a seat on the boat. On the other hand, to his friends boats and seats were minor considerations. They were at the age when the serious things of life have no appeal. They had a chance at Jerry's "goat," as he would have said, and they meant to take it.

At this juncture the station official came up, still shouting.

"Hi!" called Marchbanks. He pointed at Jerry. "*Artz!* Doctor!"

"Zo!" said the station official.

"Dr. Sumner, famous American," explained Mildway, blandly. "Best shot of the season at Monte Carlo, very moderate horseman, but excellent golfer."

The station-master gazed blankly. He knew no English.

"Stop your ragging!" said Jerry, wrathfully.

The official addressed him in Vierwaldstätter German. Jerry replied in Berlinesse. There seemed to be a deadlock when a middle-aged Swiss gentleman appeared.

"May I ask which of you is a physician?" he inquired in correct English.

Simultaneously Marchbanks and Mildway thrust their companion forward.

"This is Dr. Sumner of the United States of

America and Paris, France," said Mildway, ceremoniously. "He would have come at once, but he assumed there were others at hand more mature in the profession."

"It is nothing serious," said the Swiss. "Any doctor will do. My wife injured her ankle in alighting from the train. If you could relieve the pain—" He paused and looked appealingly at Jerry.

Jerry blushed.

"I've never practised," he said. "If there's no one else, of course I'll do what I can."

"Go to it," whispered Marchbanks. "They're the people who had the girl with them. They got on two stations back. She was a peach."

Gerald cast dark looks at his friends and followed the stranger.

Making his way through the crowd that surrounded the door of the private office of the restaurant, the Swiss knocked. A dismal moan followed.

"My wife is very apprehensive of doctors," he said gloomily. "Be patient with her."

Then a girl's voice called to them in German—a delightful voice, making that guttural tongue soft and alluring.

"Is that madame?" asked Jerry.

"My niece," whispered the Swiss. "She wishes to know shall my wife take her shoe and stocking off. As I said, she is apprehensive."

Jerry addressed himself to the unseen voice.

"She'd better leave it on," he called in German. "The best thing is to get her home or to some hotel as quickly as possible."

"That's what I've told her," the voice answered from the other side of the door. "Hot water is what she really needs."

The girl's voice was not only delightful, but her words indicated common sense and an inspiring grasp of the situation. Jerry felt an instant confidence in her.

"That's the thing," he called. "There's no fracture?"

"No," came the answer. "I've flexed it. Just a sprain, but very painful."

The wife moaned confirmingly. Jerry thrust his hand into his pocket and brought out a little bottle of tablets. "Here's some codeine," he called. "They're two-grain tablets. Give her two, and if the pain does n't stop in twenty minutes, give her two more."

The apprehensive, unseen wife moaned again. A soft "*Danke schön*" followed; the door opened slightly, and a slim, ungloved hand was thrust out.

Jerry deposited the bottle in it. For an instant his fingers touched it. To the sense of touch the hand proved as smooth and delightful as the voice, also as sensible and efficient as its directing intelligence. The door closed again.

"I think that will be all right," Jerry said to the husband. "Get a doctor as soon as you can." Then he beat his retreat. On the platform beside the boat he rejoined his companions.

"Did you operate?" inquired Marchbanks.

He answered with a dark look which suggested that he would like to operate on Marchbanks with some blunt and deadly instrument.

"I've lost my toothache pills," he said.

"And that is human gratitude," said Mildway. "I start him upon his chosen profession and give him a chance to cultivate a most delightful-looking lady—"

"How about the lady?" Marchbanks broke in.

"I did n't see her," said Jerry and followed the porters aboard the boat.

"Jerry," said Marchbanks, when they were settled on the steamer deck, "you say you did n't see the girl?"

Jerry nodded.

"And you did n't notice her when she got on the train?"



A slim, ungloved hand was thrust out

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"No."

"Well, all I can say, is that it was n't like you. She was a good deal out of the common—a very spiritual type."

Mildway burst into a roar of laughter.

"We 'll draw Lucerne for her, Marchy. We 'll find her for him. After his service to the family it ought to be. It must be. Like you, I 'm strong for romance."

"What makes you think we 'll find her in Lucerne?" asked Jerry.

"They had Lucerne railway tickets," said Mildway. "I got that from the station officer through the bilingual porter."

As they steamed down the Lake of Uri the subject was dropped. Mildway became absorbed in sight-seeing. He announced that he was a better patient after beholding the Rutli. Then they passed Brunnen and turned into the main lake with the prospect of Pilatus and Rigi before them. Toward sunset they reached Lucerne.

At a quarter of eight that evening Marchbanks knocked at Jerry's door. An absent-minded "*Herein*," bade him enter.

"We 've found your girl," Marchbanks said excitedly. "Mildway and I were strolling about, and blessed if we did n't run into them coming up the

hill in a motor-car. They live in a big house with a wall around the garden in what you'd call the Mayfair district."

Jerry tossed the letter that he had been reading on to the table.

"Sit down," he said.

Marchbanks shot him a look.

"I say," he exclaimed, "no bad news nor anything like that?" His banter had gone.

"No," said Jerry. "No one ill or dead. It's a letter from my governor. He wants me to come home."

Marchbanks appeared relieved.

"But if he's all right, why go home?" he observed. "Home is a good place to have measles."

"He wants me to come home," said Jerry in a queer voice, "and start my practice of medicine."

Marchbanks gazed at him blankly.

"Your practice of medicine?" he exclaimed. "Good heavens, man, you don't expect to practice medicine!"

"Marchy," said Jerry, "I don't know what I expect to do. I've never thought about it. Of course I came over with that as a purpose and I've knocked about year after year with that as an excuse. I know as well as you do that it would be

criminal for me to prescribe for a valuable dog, but I can't write that to the governor."

Marchbanks considered the situation thoughtfully. Jerry's attitude of mind perplexed him. He failed to see why Jerry could n't write it to his governor.

"He's never been short with you about money or anything?" he asked.

Jerry shook his head.

"That's the trouble. He's been too decent."

"Well," said Marchbanks, triumphantly, "he'll be decent when you tell him the pill business is a mistake. If you don't want to write him, take a run over next winter and have a talk. Tell him you've changed your mind about medicine and think of studying art."

Jerry gazed at him hopelessly.

"You don't get the idea," he said. "He expects me to come home and stay there."

"Oh, no; not as bad as that!" said Marchbanks, earnestly. "It can't be anything like that, or he'd never have given you such a free hand. You don't understand parents. Now listen! What happens is this: first, a joyless reception. Then the explosion in the library, with passionate word pictures of the family plate sold and the girls going out as

housemaids. Then two days of unpleasantness after which they 're jolly glad to have you get away again. The thing to do is to shoot out the whole horrible truth the first thing. It gets it off your mind and makes the unpleasantness so violent that it can't last."

Jerry shook his head. Somehow he could n't picture himself telling the whole horrible truth.

"You don't understand the situation, Marchy," he said. "The governor has been so good to me that it makes me ashamed. I could n't tell him. I almost wish I 'd worked."

"But you don't have to earn your living."

Jerry shook his head.

"No," he said: "but, you see with us every man that 's worth the powder to blow him up does something."

"Same with us," said Marchbanks. "Only we prefer huntin' and polo to pills and law. Personally, I favor shootin' and fishin'. But God knows I 'm no idler."

Jerry laughed.

"What you don't understand is that nothing is expected of you except to decorate the landscape, whereas I am expected to be useful. In Elmford, Marchy, you would be accounted a bad lot."

"What sort of place is this Elmford?" Marchbanks asked thoughtfully.

"Well," said Jerry, "first there's the river, then the railway station, then Main Street, then Elm Street, and the square. There's a bunch of old families, a plow factory, a button works, and the Eagle Hotel. I suppose, all told, there are about thirty thousand people in the place. The principal diversion is going to New York."

"Sounds rather awful," said Marchbanks in a subdued tone.

"My father loves it," Jerry went on. "I don't know why unless it's because his father loved it. My sister likes it because she's never lived anywhere else. She may marry the son of the button works or the paying teller in the bank or a bright young lawyer. Those are the eligible dancing men."

"And I suppose," suggested Marchbanks, "that you will marry the daughter of the plow works and have twelve children and grow a family physician's whiskers."

"Well, that's the question," said Jerry. "I imagine it's what the governor would like, only the family physician is a little out of the picture. You've got to know some medicine to be a family physician."

"Well, there 's only one best way out of it," said Marchbanks, sagely, "and that is not to lose weight worrying. Something will turn up. You 'll see. And now get washed and clad in suitable raiment, and I 'll scout for dinner and some proper champagne." He moved toward the door, but stopped before he got there. "I say, old man," he said affectionately, "there 's no chance of your doing anything that will interfere with the grouse-shootin' next month?"

"I don't know," Jerry answered. "The governor mentions no special time for me to sail."

"Well, you know we are counting on you from August twelfth on. There are only six guns. You can't run out. The family would never speak to me if you did."

"The Lord knows I don't want to," Jerry answered.

"Well, that 's a date, as you say," said Marchbanks, "whatever happens." He went out.

Ten minutes after he had gone Jerry was still sitting by the window with his father's letter before him. He knew that he had come to a parting of the ways. The sign on the cross-roads was plainly labeled. He loved his father. He could not conceive not loving him, for his father had always behaved in an altogether lovable manner toward him.

Yet he was not at all ready to leave the roving, cosmopolitan life of Europe that he had drifted into. He was aware that the picture that he had drawn of Elmford for Marchbanks was far from a veracious one. There was much that was delightful about Elmford; yet, compared with Paris and London and the things they implied, Elmford excited no compelling hold upon his heartstrings. All the tentacles of his daily life for eight years clung to Europe and ached in protest at the prospect of being torn loose and told to fasten upon the little New England city.

Emile, his valet, came softly in with hot water, arranged a tin bath-tub, and lighted the candles. He surveyed his work, saw that it was good, and paused before departing.

"Is there anything monsieur wishes?" he asked.

Jerry rose abruptly and squared his shoulders.

"Emile," he said, "do you want to go to America with me?"

"*Mais oui*," the man answered promptly. "Is it permitted that I inquire when we start?"

"To-morrow," was the answer. "Cook's will still be open. Get tickets and accommodations on the first ship we can make from Cherbourg or Southampton." He took a handful of notes from his pocket-book. "And you need n't mention our

leaving to Mr. Marchbank's servant," he added.

"*Bien, Monsieur,*" said Emile and departed.

Jerry began to take off his clothes with a mixture of emotions. In the main it was a sense of relief, almost elation, that possessed him. He had known that the break would have to be made sometime. Now he had made it. He was doing the right thing and he felt at peace. But he shrank from further argument with Marchbanks. In a fashion Marchbanks represented those eight delightful years of luxurious drifting and playing at work. Marchbanks in the present situation was the tempter. He must flee from him. He dined with his friends and talked shooting till midnight. Then he went to his room and scribbled a note for Marchbanks:

I'm off in the morning. I've got to do it. If I can get back for August 12 I'll cable. Love to Mildway. Help each other to be moderately good, and if you meet the beautiful niece marry her and wire me about it.

G. S.

His impulse had been to cable his father that he was sailing, but on second thought he decided against it. They would meet him in New York, kill the fatted calf, and generally make a fuss over him. He wanted nothing of that sort. It would be hard enough to explain that he was a failure at

medicine without any of the welcome-home stuff. When he arrived he would arrive, and that was all there was to it.

CHAPTER II

FORTY-EIGHT hours later Jerry boarded the *Aquitanic*. The first supporting flush of conscious virtue had died in him like drink. He felt like an extradited man, going home to face life imprisonment. He saw joy nowhere or any prospect of joy. He understood the feeling of the prodigal son on his return trip.

The passenger list held no name that he knew. His first inspection of his fellow-passengers deepened his gloom. Fate and the second steward had determined his place at table and apparently neither had been kind. On his left was a citizen of Chillicothe, returning from a German cure. This man talked of nothing but diabetes. On his right was a shoe salesman who talked of nothing but shoes. Opposite sat a stout lady who never spoke at all. Her enthusiasms ran to food.

"This is going to be a pleasant voyage," he said to himself, gloomily. By lunch time on the second day the single interest he had been able to arouse in his fellow-beings was in the stout lady's system of transporting food around the promontory of her

chest. It was not a large interest, but a genuine one. The system depended upon a rhythmical bending forward to meet the approaching mouthful that seemed like the measured swing of oarsmen. While watching her discreetly from the corner of his eye, he suddenly observed that when she was at full reach there was disclosed a momentary vista of the table diagonally beyond. Now the central feature of this vista was a girl's head in profile. It was not a commonplace profile. A mass of black hair was drawn neatly from the nape of the neck, disclosing a pleasant ear. A little nose started skyward, but stopped at exactly the right point. The corner of the mouth, which was all he could see of that feature, was entirely delightful.

His interest immediately shifted from the stout lady's transportation system, but unfortunately as she finished the course and straightened up she blocked the vista. While waiting for the next course Jerry considered his discovery from the point of view of a philosopher. Experience told him that the promise of such a profile was not likely to be fulfilled. He recalled bitter instances. His life had been a series of just such disappointments. He debated the advisability of suppressing his curiosity as to the frontal aspect of the face. Why

not preserve it always in profile? Why take chances? A Solomon, a Socrates, would let well enough alone. Acting on the dictates of philosophy, he left the table before the stout lady had finished, and retreated to the smoking-room for coffee.

The next morning some decent-looking chaps invited him to play bridge, and he played two agreeable rubbers with a loss of twenty-six dollars. The third rubber he cut out and was not sorry as he was holding unimaginably bad cards. He found a seat on the transom where the sun streamed in, and retired into his own thoughts. It was approaching noon. If Marchbanks and Mildway held to their program they were at this moment on the beach at Trouville. He could see it all in his mind's eye—the color, the life, the gaiety. Presently two Jerrys seemed to be contemplating the scene. One longed to be sitting on the warm sand with the sense of reckless enjoyment that idleness and luxury bring to youth. The other was shaking his head doubtfully. Echoes of a Puritan heredity were whispering searching questions. What did that pleasant life lead to? Why did the old-looking middle-aged men who had lived it from boyhood have the faces they had? Why were they al-

ways bored? Why did they talk as if life was over at fifty? Why were the women always having nerves and jumping out of high windows? There was something wrong about it.

As these men were, so would Marchbanks be after thirty years of pleasure-hunting; so would Jerry be if he kept along with them. It was not a pleasant outlook. There must be a better way. Perhaps, after all, there was something in strain and effort, something in the old-fashioned virtues that Marchbanks smiled at. The men who got the most fun out of life were those who worked and enjoyed work. They won going and coming, for their work made their play enjoyable. Why had he been such a fool? Why had n't he seen so obvious a fact? Why had n't he worked with a little seriousness? What made the situation worse was the impossibility of shielding his father from the consequences already accrued and taking the whole thing on his own shoulders, where it belonged. The truth would hit the governor hard. There was no dodging that. He would have to make it up to him in other ways. Various plans to this end began to shape themselves in his mind. He would learn business so as to take up the management of the family estate. He would forswear woman

and devote his life to filial piety. Somehow in some way he would make good at something even though he had failed at medicine.

However, a man of thirty-two with abounding health and sufficient money is not able to keep his mind on repentance indefinitely. When the third officer came in and announced the run, he found himself winner of the hat pool, amounting to twenty-one pounds. The turn of his gambling luck cheered him. It also reminded him that the higher philosophy is not to cry over spilled milk or to cross bridges till one comes to them.

As the bugle blew for lunch, he stepped out upon the deck. There was a game of throwing rope rings in progress, conducted by two young men and a girl. The first glance identified the girl. It was she of the profile. The first glance also refuted those warning dictates of experience. She was all the profile had suggested, perhaps more.

Academically Jerry was an advocate of blondes. He had been born that way; yet he was open-minded. What he saw now convinced him that there are indeed two sides to the question. Elementally it was a manifestation of superabundant youth speaking through the curves of a lithe body, through color that flushed under a golden skin, through eyes that danced with the zest of the game:

and the game was not putting rope rings over a stick.

As a matter of fact the vision was bad at that. But one look at the young men indicated the direction of her talents. They were subjugated, abject, ridiculous, and all this on the third day out! She finished throwing the rings, which one of the victims of love handed her, without looking at the new-comer; yet Jerry knew that she had inspected him, and that the inspection was complete. As to what her verdict was she gave no intimation. When the game of rings was finished, she smiled upon each young man individually and vanished.

Now to man generally the manifestation of youth and loveliness in the human female is not only an agreeable phenomenon, but a stimulant. Jerry had done pretty well with philosophy and health in dispelling the gloom that was logically his portion, but he now found further assistance. The problem that awaited him at his journey's end was no nearer solution, but the effect of stimulated heart action was to make it seem less important. It is thus that woman tends to maintain the life of man in hopeful perspective. It was thus that Jerry, in full possession of his faculties and as it were with wilful intent, became, as they say, interested in the young lady in question.

Early in the afternoon he observed signs that the established order of things as regards the young men and the object of their worship had undergone certain dislocations. First one then the other of the love-birds wandered into the smoking-room, lighted cigarettes, and ordered whisky and soda. Obviously she had withdrawn herself. At the end of the rubber he cut out and reconnoitered the decks. After some search he found her in her chair on the port side, amidships, reading to her mother. He passed on with an inward chuckle. He knew what the business of reading to mother meant. She was through with the love-birds. As a collector she was interested in new specimens, and for the moment he happened to be the specimen. He went back and watched the card-playing, chewing the cud of his observations and making wise plans.

Ten minutes later some one put his head in the doorway and announced ice on the port bow. He went out to the deck again and made his way forward to the place where their chairs were placed. The mother was there, but the vision's chair was empty. He joined the throng of passengers gazing seaward, and suddenly discovered her just in front of him against the rail. He edged his way through the crowd till he stood beside her. He

had determined to pick an acquaintance and he expected difficulty at first. The afternoon sun broke through the clouds and slanted down upon the iceberg. A gale was blowing, and the seas broke high on the desolate thing. Suddenly she turned and said casually:

"It's wonderful, is n't it?"

He was inclined to gasp, but did n't.

"Yes," he said. "Amazing." He felt the adjective applied to the girl as much as to the iceberg.

"We saw four on the last trip over," she went on. "The captain said we just missed running into one in the fog off the Banks."

"You came over in the *Aquitanic*?" he asked

"Yes, just for the voyage." She glanced over her shoulder at her mother in her chair against the deck-house as if to intimate that it was on her account. Then she resumed her gaze seaward.

"Lonely-looking thing," he ventured presently.

She nodded.

"It makes me think of McDowell's 'Wandering Iceberg.' Do you know it?"

"No," he said. He was uncertain whether McDowell was a poet, painter, musician, or iceman, but he took a chance and won. "Do you play it?"

"I play at it," she answered.

"I should like to hear it," he said.

She made no answer, but turned again toward her mother and waved her hand. Presently she said:

"I hope the captain keeps well to the south. I should hate to run into one."

"They say drowning is not unpleasant," Jerry remarked, "but I'm against it in cold water."

She laughed, shuddered delightfully, took a last look at the drifting ice, and moved back toward her chair. Her novel slipped from under her arm and fell to the deck.

Jerry picked it up, returned it to her, and received thanks.

"May I help you with your rug?" he asked.

"Oh, no," she said; "I can manage my own rug. I'm not as helpless as that."

But he tucked her in while the mother, a sweet-faced, weary-looking woman, smiled vaguely on him. Then he bowed and took his leave. As he reëntered the smoking-room he said to himself:

"By this time to-morrow afternoon, Sumner, you shall have heard 'The Wandering Iceberg' rendered on the piano in the ladies' sitting-room. You are not doing badly." His manner was jubilant. His impression of the lady was that she was "some girl."

The next morning he breakfasted late. The

stout lady had finished and gone, but in the open vista there was no profile. After he had fortified the inner man he went on deck to scout. The two chairs on the port side, amidships, were vacant, nor were any books, pillows, or rugs in evidence. He made a tour of the three passenger decks, found nothing, and retired to the smoking-room, where the auction-players were waiting for him. As he arranged his cards he tried to account for the empty chairs. As tactics the move was new to him.

At lunch he had a mere glimpse of her. She was not in her place when the stout lady's bendings first opened the view, but appeared suddenly while the Chillicothean was holding forth on diabetic breads. Then the stout lady remained static for a long period, and when the view next opened, the profile was gone. Another inspection of the decks showed the chairs still unoccupied. Clearly something was wrong. He detected one of the lovers loafing mournfully in the vicinity. This made him feel safe, and he went on to the smoking-room for his coffee. All afternoon he played cards, trusting to the movements of the love-birds for information. One or the other strolled out of the place from time to time, but returned shortly, and so he knew that the chairs were still empty. Dinner came, and she made no appearance. Thus the day

passed, and he had not heard "The Wandering Iceberg." He was baffled. He engaged one of the love-birds in conversation, but was able to gather no information. The bird was as ignorant of the cause of the disappearance as himself and much more upset about it.

The next day and the next and two more passed, and the absence of the vision continued and remained unexplained. The love-birds, realizing that life is short, buried their sorrows and sought consolation, one in the deserted wife of a bridge-player, the other in drink. Jerry played cards with varying fortune, and the voyage drew to an end.

The evening of the seventh day as he was thinking of bed, the ship's doctor strolled into the smoking-room, dropped into the seat beside him and proposed a nightcap. Now the doctor was a County Meath man, and discovering that Jerry had hunted a winter from Navan, his heart warmed, and it was past midnight before they killed their last fox and faced the idea of turning in.

"By the way," said Jerry,—as he rose to say good night an idea had come to him,—"do you happen to know what has become of that pleasant-looking, dark-haired girl? Did she fall overboard?"

"Are you inquiren' as a friend of the family?" asked the doctor.

"It might be that way," said Jerry.

"Then I'll be tellin' ye in confidence that her mother is an ill woman."

"What 's the matter with her?"

"Begad, I wish I knew that. She says it's a heart attack, but to save me soul I can't find anything wrong there. She just lies and moans and frightens the pretty daughter nigh to death. If there was a medical man among the passengers, I'd have him in."

Jerry grinned. The temptation was strong.

The Irishman looked at him searchingly.

"You're not of the profession yourself?" he demanded.

"I've got a sheepskin."

"Then, by the powers, ye must see the woman in the morning. I'll no longer bear the responsibility alone. At least ye can cheer up the girl."

"I'm afraid it would n't do," Jerry answered. "I don't practise. Besides, the voyage is nearly over."

"Of course it will do," the Irishman insisted. "I'll come for ye at half-past ten in the morning. And now good night."

And so it came about that at twenty minutes of

eleven the next morning, despite more remonstrances and certain qualms of conscience, he followed Dr. Rafferty into the sick woman's state-room. The vision, who was sitting on the transom reading, looked up and eyed him with an air of mixed amazement and what he took to be suspicion. He felt himself blushing guiltily. He regretted that he had undertaken the adventure. He knew that she knew why he had come and believed that he was no doctor at all, which was almost the truth.

"Good morning, Mrs. Tyler," called Rafferty, heartily. "I'm bringing Dr. Sumner to see ye, a famous heart specialist who happened to be crossin' with us, and I'll have the pleasure of introducin' him to you, my dear young lady, though I pray the saints ye'll have no need of his professional services."

The vision, now identified as Miss Grace Tyler, bowed stiffly. Jerry avoided her eye and addressed himself to the invalid. It was necessary that he should be as professional as possible.

"As I understand," he said, "you came for the rest and quiet of the voyage?"

She nodded weakly.

"And you were taken ill almost at once?"

"While coming down the bay," she answered

wearily. "Then I got better and was very well till this new attack. I've always enjoyed the sea," she added. "My husband had a schooner yacht, and we went everywhere."

"Excuse me," said Jerry, "but did you ever have an attack like this on land?" A new interest in the case seemed to have come to him.

The sick woman nodded.

"Was n't it the time we went out to Santa Barbara?" she answered, appealing to her daughter.

The girl nodded.

"And you had another one coming back?" suggested Jerry.

"Yes," said the daughter. "The doctor said it was the altitude." Her manner seemed to be thawing a little.

"Well, there's no altitude here," observed Dr. Rafferty. "Nothing but longitude and latitude."

Jerry took the sick woman's pulse, looked at her tongue, and announced that he would take the liberty of making some suggestion to Dr. Rafferty. He might look in again later in the day.

"Do you think you can cure her?" the girl demanded.

"I think it's a possibility," Jerry answered modestly.

She looked at him gratefully and, as if wishing

to make amends for her suspicions, held out her hand and smiled.

Jerry took it. It was a pleasant hand to take.

"Don't be frightened," he said cheerily. "It's nothing serious."

When they were on deck the Irishman accosted him.

"What do you make of it?"

"My belief," said Jerry, "is that the good lady is neither more nor less than thoroughly seasick. I had an aunt that could n't get aboard a street-car without being taken the same way. It's the machinery. You see, a sailing vessel does n't bother her. Give her the usual dope and a little champagne and cracked ice, and she'll be right as rain. That's the way it was with my aunt."

"Begad, I think you're right. You're a genius at diagnosis!" cried the doctor.

"But don't tell her it is n't heart disease," added Jerry. "And you might call the champagne a French cardiac."

Rafferty looked at him and laughed.

"Spoken like a king's physician," he said. "You'll go far, me boy, in our chosen profession."

Jerry laughed, but made no explanations. In the afternoon he called again at the Tylers' cabin.

The girl met him at the door with the news that the invalid was sleeping.

"She 's decidedly better," she whispered. "She took some bouillon for lunch."

"Don't you think you 'd better get up on deck and have some air?" he suggested.

The girl shook her head.

"Not now, but perhaps later. But don't expect me." She gave him a friendly smile, and Jerry's interest deepened.

Of course Jerry did expect her and waited about till the first bugle blew for dinner, but it was in vain. If she came on deck, he missed her. He regretted it. She was a very attractive girl, but he had reached the philosophical age. He had found that life gives less trouble if man bows gracefully to fate, specially where the ladies are concerned.

That night they picked up Fire Island light and were due to dock before noon the next day. Jerry was on deck early. The hot calm of a July morning was on the bay. As they passed quarantine, he stood by the rail, gazing at the colossal Liberty and the weird sky-line of Manhattan growing out of the sunlit haze. He had heard men speak with regret and melancholy of the ending of a voyage

and had never understood. Now he began to feel it himself. He wondered if the prospect of parting with the vision had anything to do with it. He could not truthfully say it had. For a week, detached from past and future, he had put away his troubles and lived agreeably in the day. But now immediately ahead of him his problem was waiting. There was the rub. The pleasant life of the past eight years lay three thousand miles behind. As he gazed broodingly at his native land he heard the rustle of a woman's dress and, turning, confronted Miss Tyler. Her exuberant color had faded somewhat, but she was still radiant with that unquenchable youth which was so great a part of her beauty. Jerry raised his hat.

"I hope your mother is much better," he said.

"Very, very much," she answered. "She is so grateful to you. We both feel that if we had only had you at once you would have cured her at the beginning.

"I did n't do anything," he answered. "Rafferty is the man to thank. But I wish Mrs. Tyler had escaped all she has been through for more than one reason. The calamity of the voyage was your disappearance from society."

She flushed a little.

"Yes, I believe that," she said ironically.

"You don't have to take my word for it," he answered. "The ring game has n't been out of the box since you left us."

She laughed, and her color deepened.

"It's the cruel fact," he went on. "And, besides, I never heard 'The Wandering Iceberg' and now I never shall."

"You must have a sister or somebody that plays," she suggested.

"No *somebody*. You can guess my chance with a sister."

"Well, you'll hear it somehow."

He shook his head.

"No; that is one of the irrevocable might-have-beens."

"Perhaps it's just as well," she observed. "I'm afraid you're not a very serious person. It would be wasted on you."

He protested at that.

"You'll never know how wrong you are. That's my greatest regret. Perhaps in the next world we'll meet, and you'll understand me and play for me."

"On a golden harp," she suggested.

"If you can play iceberg pieces on a harp."

She regarded him hesitatingly.

"I want to ask you something," she said. "I

know it's silly to ask personal questions when I shall probably never see you again."

"Ask away."

"Mother was wondering whether by any chance you were Dr. Gerald Sumner of Elmford, Connecticut?"

He masked his surprise.

"Perhaps I ought to get advice of counsel before answering," he replied. "Would it be used against me if I was?"

"I can make no promises as to that."

"Then I'll put it another way. What do you know about Dr. Gerald Sumner of Elmford, Connecticut?"

"What every one in Elmford knows, that he's been studying abroad for eight years and ought to know everything about medicine."

Jerry chuckled, but as the significance of her remark got to him, it seemed less humorous.

"So you live in Elmford?" he said.

"I did n't say that," she answered quickly. "I said I knew what Elmford people knew about this particular Doctor Sumner." She paused and looked at him. They were at a deadlock, neither able to score.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Jerry, propos-

ing a compromise. "I'll tell you the truth if you'll tell me the truth."

"All right," she answered.

With an air of mystery he said:

"You guessed it. I *am* Dr. Gerald Sumner of Elmford."

Imitating his manner, she answered:

"And I live in Elmford." She met his look and giggled. There was another *impasse*.

"I don't think I can believe you," he said doubtfully.

"I know I can't believe you," she retorted.

"But I can refer you to the passenger list."

"You're down as 'G. Sumner, Paris.'"

"And you're down as 'Mrs. Tyler and daughter, U. S. A.'"

"Well, you'll see if you come to Elmford," she said gaily.

"Then I shall certainly see because I'm certainly going to Elmford," he answered.

He gathered from the change in her expression that some one was approaching behind him. He glanced over his shoulder and saw one of the love-birds.

"Well," he said, "I suppose I must get some breakfast. But remember, if I don't turn up in

Elmford, I'll have your harp all tuned and waiting in heaven."

"And pick me out a becoming halo," she added. "That is, if you don't appear in Elmford."

He laughed, raised his hat, and left her.

"She's stalling, of course, about Elmford," he thought. "But she must know people there. I'll find out about her."

Emile accosted him at the foot of the companion-way with the information that everything was packed.

"I suppose you'd like to see something of New York," Jerry suggested.

"I have a cousin who is chef," replied Emile, hopefully. "He lives in the Sixty-fourth Street, East. He has promised to show me the town, as he calls it."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Jerry. "I'm going to cut for home, but I'll leave you to get the luggage through the customs, and you can spend the night in town and come on to Elmford to-morrow. Only don't let your cousin show you too much." Emile laughed wisely.

They went down to the state-room for final directions; thence Jerry proceeded to breakfast. Miss Tyler made no further appearance. The ship docked about ten. Jerry was one of the first to get

ashore. As he reached terra firma he looked back and caught a glimpse of the girl standing against the rail with a mass of purple orchids at her belt. A masculine figure was beside her, but his back was turned, and Jerry could only be sure that it was not one of the love-birds. He hazarded the guess that if he was the source of the orchids he was not a brother. Then he pushed on to have his handbags examined at the gate, and secured a taxi. At the Grand Central he found he had ten minutes before his train started and he decided to telegraph his father.

"It will be surprise enough as it is," he thought. "There's no use overdoing it. It might bring on apoplexy."

CHAPTER III

COLONEL ADDISON SUMNER had a theory that divided mankind into what he called the centrifugal and centripetal types. The temperament of the former expanded outward, craved society, travel, and superficial experience of wide areas. His favorite example of budding centrifugality was the child that is odious at home, but an angel of grace with strangers. The centripetal character, on the other hand, turned inward, made but few friends, was content in the environment in which it developed, and desired what are sometimes called "the real things" of life.

He himself was typically centripetal. His ambitions and activities centered in the little New England city in which he had been born, his hopes and affections in the idea of home. Thus constituted, fate in some ways had been singularly generous to him. He lived in the house in which he had been born—a house which his great grandfather had built, a house mellow with Sumner tradition. The old furniture had been bought new when Adam, Chippendale, and Sheraton were at

work. A Sumner had planted the great elms and laid out the lawns. In the garden was box that dated from before the Revolution.

Fate, however, had left Addison Sumner a widower when his second child, the daughter, was born, and this blow at his home had been a staggering one. A man of less character and direction might have succumbed under it and drifted into dilettante habits and European wanderings. But with Addison Sumner it stimulated new efforts to save what was precious to him. His hope for the future lay now in his children. The happiness of his old age depended on the relation that he should establish with them. Whether they would go forth and leave him old and alone in his empty house, or arrange their lives about his, he believed depended entirely upon himself.

To make the house gay and attractive, to make himself their friend and companion, was relatively easy for him. He enjoyed it and did it well. But in considering their future, specially that of his boy, he realized that he must take chances. If Gerald was to be to him what he hoped, it must be because the boy wanted it. No sense of compulsion must enter in. If the boy was to make his life in the little New England city he must do it with full knowledge of the outer world. He must

do it because his sense of values made it the desirable thing to do. So with a courage no one suspected because no one knew what the sacrifice cost, he sent Gerald away, first to school and then to college.

The boy's talents at foot-ball and rowing were immediately apparent. Beyond that he seemed possessed of a quick, inquiring mind, with a bent for science rather than for academic studies. By the time he was graduated from Harvard he had decided upon medicine for a profession, but whether from boyish impulse or from some deep-seated trend of mind, the father could not judge. Personally he would have preferred his son to manifest a polite interest in politics and a disposition to manage the family estate, but he faced the situation without flinching. There was only one thing to do. He must give the boy every advantage of education and training. Accordingly after Gerald took his degree at the medical school he sent him abroad to complete his studies. Somewhat to his alarm he began to realize that the completion of Gerald's studies was like the completion of Dido's weaving. Two years at Edinburgh was followed by a request for a year in London. The year in London led to two more in Germany, and the year in Germany made Paris inevitable.

But all this time his faith both in his policy and in his son never wavered. He had sowed that later he should reap abundantly. Gerald was fitting himself to be a great man. His answers to requests for more time were always in the same key of trustful acquiescence. "I know you know what you 're doing, my son," he would write. "If you think you ought to go to Paris, go by all means. When you get ready to come back we shall be glad, but don't hurry. Your career must come first."

But at last the colonel began to fear lest Gerald's mental equipment would become too imposing for Elmford. He wrote, pointing out the mistake of becoming "too theoretical," and suggested that Jerry make his professional start as a practitioner not later than the autumn. Meanwhile he had been preparing a surprise for Jerry which he hoped would reconcile the cosmopolitan young doctor to the little town.

The morning that Jerry landed the colonel spent at his desk in the library writing checks for the monthly bills. A pile of stamped envelopes addressed in his old-fashioned, copper-plate hand grew under his labors. Toward noon, as he was finishing, an automobile horn squawked a rhythmic series of toots evidently constituting a private signal. The colonel smiled and glanced at the

clock. A moment later a girl swept boisterously into the room and embraced him.

Marion Sumner was twenty-four, but appeared younger. Possibly the will not to grow up had physiological consequences. At this period in her life the most important thing was to get distance with her wooden clubs and do the eighteen holes under ninety-five. Modernity was exemplified in Marion even as the passing order typified her father.

"Anything in the morning mail?" she demanded.

The colonel shook his head.

"It looks to me as if our wandering boy had got lost," she observed. "We'll have to go after him."

The colonel smiled.

"Would you mind?"

"Not if we could look for him at the Paris dress-makers'. Really, Father," she added, "I've got to get some clothes or I'll be arrested."

"Well," he said, "why don't you go to New York and get them?"

"Too busy this week," was the answer. "I'm just getting back on my iron shots. I came in in forty-nine this morning."

"Whom were you playing with?"

"Just Budd," she answered. Her tone implied

that playing golf with Budd Woodbridge was like playing with one's maiden aunt.

The colonel looked at her with an expression intended to be roguish.

"You seem to be playing somewhat regularly with Budd."

She looked at him with utter hopelessness as at one beyond the possibility of understanding, and said:

"I suppose you know the laundry boiler is leaking."

"I telephoned the plumber this morning," he replied.

At this juncture the door-bell rang. They looked at each other in silence, listening to the foot-fall of the parlor maid on her way to the door. For the last three weeks they had been listening every time the muffled ringing of the bell sounded in the pantry, the expectation of a cable in the minds of each.

"It's some things I ordered from Skinner's," Marion observed.

"I suppose so," said the colonel. He rose, gathered up the pile of envelops, and slipped a rubber band about them. Then the parlor maid entered, bearing the telegram that announced Jerry's arrival on the one-five train.

At two o'clock a measure of calm had been restored. They were still sitting around the lunch table, the colonel radiant, but with eyes still misty, Marion calm and sisterly in the manner of the modern sister, devouring the tale of the young Odysseus. The reason why they had not heard from him for so long was that his father's letter had lain a week at Lucerne before he got it. The very next morning he had started. He had not written because he knew he would beat the mails. He was some swift traveler. It certainly was great to be home! Bully! Nothing like it! Never wanted to set foot out of the house again. There was no one like his father. Marion had become a peach. No place like Elmford. If any part of his joy was acted, it defied detection. He ate an entire omelet and several chops. As for the green corn from the garden, the first of the season, it was worth a voyage around the world. He must congratulate old Watkins, the vegetable gardener. He must embrace Mrs. Tuttle, queen of omelet-makers. He had already wrung the hand of James Bannock, the butler, till that venerable support of the Sumner household winced. He must forthwith inspect the entire place and see everybody. Suddenly he started as a man who realizes that he

had almost forgotten what he came to inquire about.

"Great Scott!" he cried, "I've been talking so hard I'm nutty. What on earth is that new wing that has grown out of the side of the house? No one has written about it. What does it mean?"

Marion and the colonel glanced at each other significantly.

"By Jupiter!" Jerry shouted, "Marion's going to be married! It's a dove-cote for the bride and groom!"

Marion giggled.

"You're an idiot," she said.

"Yes, it is," he insisted. "But why didn't you write me about it? Who is he, anyway?"

"Perhaps you can guess when you see," said the colonel.

"We ought to blindfold him," said Marion. "It must burst on him."

"I'll keep my eyes shut," he promised.

Arm in arm they led him through the new door under the stairs, down the passage, then through another door, and the word was given to look. He opened his eyes and stared about him dumfoundedly. What he saw was a great room lined with cupboards and book-shelves. A flat-topped

desk stood in the center, with a revolving-chair drawn up before it, a patient's chair on the other side. On the walls hung an engraving of the first operation with ether and pictures of a similar character. The room was unquestionably a doctor's office.

"The best private medical library in New England," announced Marion with a wave at the bookcases. "Everything from appendicitis to zymotics. All the latest wrinkles in stethoscopes and tonsil-cutters." She flung open cupboard after cupboard, disclosing shelves filled with instruments and apparatus. "Model operating-room to the left," she went on, seizing him by the arm and dragging him with her. "X-ray machine and developing-room adjoining; waiting-room to accommodate twenty patients across the hall. All magazines and comic papers on the table one year paid in advance; attendant's office through that door."

He followed dumbly while she played guide till they came upon a glittering sign with the legend:

"Gerald Sumner, M. D.

Office Hours $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} 10 \text{ to } 12 \text{ A. M.} \\ 2 \text{ to } 4 \text{ P. M.} \end{array} \right.$

"That will go up to-morrow," she announced.

"And all of it to the dust cloths in the housemaid's closet father did himself."

Jerry turned and faced his parent.

"But, Father!" he gasped.

"Not a word!" said the colonel, beaming.

"You've deserved it, and I know you'll use it as it deserves to be used." He paused as Bannock appeared in the doorway.

"Will you see the plumbers, sir?" said the butler.

"In a moment," the colonel answered. "And if there is anything you find wrong or lacking, Gerald," he went on, "I want you to tell me truthfully, and we'll make it right. A good man must have good tools." He then turned and followed Bannock to the back of the house.

"Is n't it wonderful?" said Marion. "He has been at it for six months. I think he expects people to be coming up from New York to consult you."

"It's rather taken the wind out of me," said Jerry.

"I'll leave you to get your breath," she answered. "I've got some telephoning to do. Do you want to play golf this afternoon?"

"I can't; my things won't get here until to-morrow," he said in a hollow voice.

"I see," she said. She waved at him and was gone.

Jerry stood for a time gazing dumbly about him. Nothing that he had imagined or feared compared with the facts. He had read a poem once which spoke of "fetters forged by love." He understood now what they were. He saw himself a prisoner till old age came upon him, silvering his hair. He saw death at last signing his release. Finally, his best despair being inadequate to the situation, he burst out laughing.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN Jerry recovered somewhat from the shock of the offices he decided that he must immediately have a plain talk with his father. As Marchbanks had advised, he must blurt out the whole horrible truth. It would be a fearful blow to the colonel. The long-tried patience of that good man would give way at last. There would be an explosion. It might end in his being disowned, an outcast. But it had to be.

Marion had gone to bed. The more reliable of the library clocks indicated a quarter past ten. Jerry was sitting in an easy-chair on one side of the table. The colonel in an easy-chair on the other side was going through the New York evening papers with his glasses half-way down his nose. The psychological moment had come. With a queer, weak feeling in his knees, Jerry flung his cigar at the fireplace and cleared his throat.

"Father," he said, "there is something I want to talk to you about."

The colonel laid the paper on his knees.

"The time and money you've spent on these offices make me very uncomfortable. I don't deserve it. The fact is I have n't worked as I should have done. To put it plainly, sir, I've loafed. Instead of getting down to cases and boning, I've been getting smatterings of half a dozen different specialties. The result is I don't know anything thoroughly. I'm about as incompetent to undertake a general practitioner's job as a piano-tuner." He stopped. The horrible truth was out. He looked straight ahead of him with burning face, waiting for the crash.

"Well," said the colonel after a silence that seemed eternal, "I think your frankness and modesty are very creditable, Jerry. In your place I think I should have loafed a good deal myself. I've had a hope that you would work into some sort of specialist's practice in Elmford, but, of course, we've got to wait and see what happens. You'll probably have time to brush up on fundamentals before you're troubled with patients. That's one of the reasons why I got that library. I think it would be a mistake to give up without first making a try at it," he went on, "but if it does n't go, if the patients don't come after a reasonable length of time, I sha'n't want you to keep at it." He picked up his newspaper and went on reading. This

was the great crash. It was almost a disappointment.

The next morning the brass sign went up, and Jerry started boning fundamentals. Emile arrived during the forenoon and was installed as office attendant with the theoretical duty of answering the office door-bell and ushering in patients between the hours of ten and twelve, and two and four.

That afternoon an east wind set in with rain that fell steadily for two days. The effect of the weather was to deepen Jerry's sense of sin and shortcoming and to quicken his ardor for medical research. During this period his attitude toward the question of patients varied from hour to hour. At times, filled with the desire to make good, he longed for pestilence and a stricken public thronging the waiting-room. His fear was that no one would ever come. At other times, overcome with a sense of his unfitness, his fear was that they would. A book agent rang the office bell during one of these latter states of mind and threw him into a panic.

However, on the third day the sun came out upon a refreshed and glittering world, and the natural man in Jerry began to recover his normal tone. With the office windows open and the sun stream-

ing in, the fundamentals of medicine seemed less important and more oppressive than on the preceding days. Osler's book on practice lay open, but unread. Jerry's hand stretched out for a match to light his cigarette when Marion came in.

"Jerry," she said, "Preston De Witt has just telephoned, asking us to make up a foursome this afternoon. Will you play?"

"I don't mind," he assented, "if it's after office hours. What has Preston turned into? I have n't seen him since he was a kid."

"I don't think I'm crazy about him," observed Marion, "but he's very clever. Mr. Grant has taken him into their law firm, which means a good deal, and he certainly makes the big hit with the ladies."

"The village cut-up, eh?"

"Something like that. He plays good golf."

"Well, then," said Jerry, "we'll play together and trim him. Who is the other girl?"

"Some one I want you to meet," she answered. "Grace Tyler."

Of course the obvious thing was for Jerry to exclaim and tell about the voyage. But Jerry was not given to the obvious. Moreover, he had an instinct for jokes. He scented one ahead.

"Tyler, I don't remember any Elmford Tylers," he said thoughtfully.

"They only came here about a year ago," Marion answered. "They're very nice people. Grace has been a great success. She's very pretty and amusing; also she'll have money."

"Why would n't she do for me?"

"I should think the question was whether you'd do for her," retorted Marion. "Anyway, Preston is on the job."

"How little you know about these things!" said Jerry. "A man who is willing to take the trouble can marry any woman he likes. But don't think I'm going to take the trouble," he added. "Liberty is the thing till a man is fifty. After that, some nice, adaptable little wife and home and fire-side."

"You're disgusting," said Marion.

"But," he continued, "if this fellow De Witt is unworthy of Miss Tyler, there is no reason why we should n't help her to see her danger."

"I hope," said Marion, devoutly, "that when you get it really bad, I'll be there to enjoy it. I never saw such conceit. I wish Grace would take the trouble to show you a little attention."

"It would be very nice if she would," he said teasingly.

"Well, she won't," Marion answered. "She is too much occupied to bother with you."

Jerry smiled innocently.

"Marion," he said, "I'll bet you a box of golf balls that I'll make such a hit in five minutes that she'll propose playing with me instead of Preston."

"Are you dippy?" she exclaimed.

"Are you taking the bet?"

"Of course I am," she answered. She gave him a look of sisterly contempt and started to go.

"One minute," he called. "You and Grace have n't got anything planted on me?"

"I have n't seen her for a month," Marion answered. "She took her mother abroad, and they've been in New York since they landed. She only got back to Elmford last night."

When she had gone, Jerry began to compose a note on his best office stationery:

DEAR MISS TYLER:

I am informed that you were really telling the truth about living in Elmford, also that I'm to have the pleasure of playing golf with you this afternoon. Both were nice things to hear. Marion does n't know we were shipmates, and has been telling me what a haughty, far-away queen you are. Suppose we keep the fact that we were shipmates to ourselves for a while. I'd like to put one over on little sister. If you would be willing to take

me on as a partner this afternoon, it would be very nice. I think we could trim them and add a little to the gaiety of nations and the Sumner family.

Yours sincerely,

GERALD SUMNER.

When the noon whistles blew, Jerry slipped down town to the leading florist and despatched his note with two dozen American Beauties.

Till half past three that afternoon he toiled manfully with Osler. Then he closed the book with a bang, went to the closet, and returned with a bag of golf clubs. He dumped out a dozen golf balls and began to put across the rug. As he got his eye and hand together, his spirits rose. Despite his thirty-two years, Jerry was very much a boy. Why should he worry? He had told his father the truth; he was doing the best he could. If no patients came, it was not his fault. And why should they come? He had heard of young doctors waiting years for a case, and there were enough established physicians in Elmford to fight a plague. He made three excellent puts in succession and smiled. He was good at golf. There was no denying it. That day he felt like playing. Very likely he would get around under eighty. The thought of Grace Tyler, with her wonderful color, her delightful little nose, her charm, and youth,

put him on his mettle. He putted on till ten minutes of four. Then he gathered up the balls and was going to his room to change into flannels when Emile appeared.

"Monsieur," the man said excitedly, "outside in the waiting-room there is what you call one patient."

Jerry's jaw dropped.

"*Gott in Himmel!*" he muttered. What had led this miserable, unsuspecting creature to invade his office?

"Look here, Emile," he said desperately, "I have got to go at four. Tell him there is a very good doctor around the corner in Chestnut Street, Dr. Kales."

"But it is a lady," said Emile. "She wants to see you. She looks very ill."

"A lady?" he repeated. That was worse. He had a mental picture of a bent and withered crone tottering in to enumerate her symptoms. "An old lady, I suppose?" he suggested.

"Not so old," said Emile, hopefully.

Jerry looked at the clock.

"Emile," he said, "show her in and then telephone Miss Marion at the country club that I'll be a few minutes late." He hurried to the desk, coughed formally, composed his features into his

idea of a professional expression, and began to write busily on the scribble pad. The door opened. There was a rustle of a dress. He looked up. A girl, slim and young, was standing timidly before him. The details of her appearance escaped him. All he saw was a pair of violet eyes fixed on him with a look of wistful appeal.

PART II



CHAPTER V

CONFRONTED with the undeniable fact of a flesh-and-blood patient, Jerry bowed ceremoniously and in a voice like that of old Farwell, Elmford's fashionable undertaker, begged her to be seated.

The girl coughed nervously and sank into the chair and faced the desk. She was perhaps twenty, dressed with an expensive and somewhat severe simplicity in a style hardly suggestive of Elmford. For the rest she was blonde, with a mass of fair hair that seemed to be struggling to escape from under her hat; but the spell exerted by her mild, appealing eyes dominated the impression that she made upon Jerry. He noted the little cough as a possible symptom and, opening a drawer, took out an index card and dipped his pen in the ink.

"Your name, please?" he asked, with a business-like brusqueness not unmixed with weariness, as if the routine repetition of the question had worn upon him.

"Virginia Xelva," was the answer. She noted his look of perplexity, and spelled the name, a trace

of some foreign accent showing in her intonation. He entered the name and went on to the next heading.

“Address?”

“I have n’t any,” she said with a little embarrassment. “Just now I’m at a boarding-house. I don’t know the number; it’s down—” She looked about her as if expecting to find it in a corner of the room. “It’s three streets in that direction, then to the right.”

“Willow Street?” he suggested.

“That’s it,” she said and smiled gratefully.

He wrote, “Willow Street, number unknown.”

“Married?” was the next inquiry.

“No; not married.”

“Children—of course not,” he went on. “Nationality?”

She hesitated a moment, then answered:

“American.”

He glanced up at her with an involuntary questioning in his look, but she seemed unaware of it, and he continued.

“Now let’s see. Parents living?”

“No,” she said softly.

“Cause of father’s death, cause of mother’s death. Can you tell me?” He asked this in a softer, more paternal tone than he had used before.

"My mother died of a fever," she answered.

"My father was killed in an accident."

"I see," he said gently and went on writing. Her age she gave as twenty-one. Her color he entered as white. "Only one thing more. Occupation?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"As yet I have none."

He drew a dash with his pen.

"And now," he said with a renewal of the professional manner, "suppose you tell me what seems to be the trouble."

"The trouble?" Perplexed, she looked at him.

"Why, yes, your symptoms. Why do you need a doctor?"

Suddenly her eyes flashed comprehendingly, and she smiled.

"I'm afraid there is a misunderstanding," she said. "I am not a patient."

"Not a patient?" he repeated. If she was not a patient, who, in heaven, was she and what? If she was not a patient, by what right had she put him through the ordeal that he had been undergoing? He hung between righteous indignation and a desire to laugh.

"Why, no; I am very well," she said apologetically. "I came here from the agency."

He looked mystified.

"Mrs. Thompson said you had just opened an office and might want an office nurse."

"Oh, Mrs. Thompson's employment agency!"

"Yes; I suppose you don't need one. I'm sorry to have troubled you." She stopped with a quaver in her voice and made as if to rise.

"Wait a minute," he said impulsively. "Are you really looking for a position for yourself?" What was in his mind was: "Are you really in need of a job? Can it be that a girl dressed as you are is hard up and has to work?"

She must have divined his thought, for she colored faintly and answered:

"I should be very glad to get something to do."

"But the only thing I could offer you isn't a trained nurse's work," he went on.

"I'm not yet a trained nurse," she answered. "I thought if I could get a position answering the bell and the telephone I could study and learn."

"But why do you want to be a nurse?"

"Why?" she repeated. "Why, because I love it. Next to being a doctor, it seems to me the finest thing one can do." Her eyes lighted with an enthusiasm that repressed his inclination to laugh.

"But what makes you think it's a fine thing to be a doctor?" he demanded.

"What other profession gives one such a chance to help people?" she answered. "But you're probably making fun of me," she added. "Good doctors must know how wonderful their work is."

It was on his tongue to say, "You see, I'm not a good doctor," but something held it back.

"The trouble with a position in my office," he went on, "is that you might n't get a chance to learn much about nursing. What you ought to do is to go to New York and take the regular course at one of the hospitals."

"I would," she answered, "only I have to support myself, and so I have to take some kind of position like this." The wistful, haunting eyes met his.

"Well," he said, "if you would care to come and help us out till something better turned up, I should be glad to have you."

She looked at him with a gratitude that left her speechless.

"The obligation is all on my side," he said quickly. He had a horrible feeling that she was going to weep.

"You are so good!" she murmured. Then she added with embarrassment: "I have n't references. I don't know any one here. I did n't expect to do this when I came to Elmford."

"That's all right," he said cheerily. "I know as much about you as you do about me. Now I suppose we ought to be businesslike and talk about terms. What's your idea of salary?"

"I don't suppose I'm worth anything just now," she said hopelessly. "You'll have to teach me everything."

"There is an advantage in not having to unlearn things," he suggested. "That ought to be worth a good deal."

"Please let me leave the business part of it to you. Anything you say will be satisfactory, more than satisfactory."

"Well, then we'll call it settled. When would you like to begin?"

"Why, any time it's convenient."

"Good! Suppose you start in to-morrow morning." He touched the bell, and Emile appeared. "Emile," he said, "Miss Xelva is going to relieve you of your office responsibilities."

She started up protestingly,

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed. "I could n't take the place away from any one."

The Frenchman grinned.

"You need n't worry about him," said Jerry. "He's not leaving us and he's greatly relieved to be out of the office. Miss Xelva will take charge

of the office, beginning to-morrow," he went on. "Show her where to put her things. Fix that desk up for her in the waiting-room office and explain as well as you are able your extensive duties."

Emile grinned again.

"If mademoiselle is ready, I will show her now."

She turned her childlike, questioning eyes upon him as if to reassure herself that it was really as Jerry had said.

"You are very good," she murmured gratefully. "I am quite ready."

"Then I'll leave you in his hands. I have an engagement at four," said Jerry and retreated into the house. As he changed into his flannels he reflected on what he had done. He had hired a young woman whom he did not need, about whom he knew nothing, and who, according to her own statements, knew nothing of her job. It was not a bright thing to do.

"But you can't let a girl like that knock around the streets looking for a way to make her bread and butter," he defended himself. Just what he meant by "a girl like that" he did not take the trouble to discover. It might have been that her appearance indicated that she was not used to being thrown upon her own resources. It might have been something more psychological, something that

had to do with the impression made by her undeniably extraordinary eyes. At a quarter past four he jumped into the waiting motor-car and speeded off for his golf and the meeting with the vision.

Among other things that add to the interest of life by turning out contrary to design and expectation are practical jokes. In the theory of chances there was little likelihood that Jerry's rather boyish conspiracy to conceal from Marion his voyage with Grace Tyler would work out. But as a matter of fact it did. The suggestion embodied in Jerry's note appealed to Grace. Any suggestion appealed to Grace that tended to mortify the proprietary instincts of man. Preston De Witt was too intelligent a young man to allow his proprietary instincts to become manifest, but Grace knew that they were there, and she knew that it was good sense to run the steam roller over them when she got the chance. Moreover, it was the kind of thing that interested her and which she did well. Therefore the joke was on. She wore one of Jerry's roses. She made herself obviously delightful to him and insisted that it was unthinkable that a brother and sister should play together. As a consequence, with Jerry as a partner she defeated Preston and Marion four up and three to play. There had been few rounds of golf that Jerry had enjoyed more.

As they were having tea on the club veranda, the question came up of a return match. Marion wanted revenge.

"How about to-morrow afternoon?" she suggested.

Preston shook his head regretfully. He was fearfully busy. He did n't know when he could get off again. The fact was he had not enjoyed the afternoon.

"Why not get Budd?" said Grace.

"I hear he 's sick," said Preston. "He has n't been at the office for a couple of days."

"Sick?" said Marion. "What 's the matter with him?"

"Don't ask me," said Grace, carelessly. "I saw him for a few minutes last night. He seemed all right. But if he 's sick, he ought to see Dr. Sumner."

"That 's the way to talk," said Marion. "Liberal commissions on all new business."

"Mother will get rich, then," said Grace, laughing. "She thinks he 's the greatest living doctor."

"Are you talking about Budd Woodbridge?" asked Jerry.

Marion nodded.

"Great Scott!" said Jerry, "you don't mean to say he 's grown up!"

"He 's twenty-four."

"Gosh!" said Jerry. "The last time I saw him he was in knee pants. What sort of critter has he turned into? He was a nice kid."

There was silence for a moment, then Grace said:

"I think he 's quite a dear. Don't you, Marion?"

"Why, yes, of course," said Marion, calmly. "The only thing I have against him is his dancing. You see, Jerry, we all look on him as a sort of cross between a brother and a maiden aunt. He 's grown fearfully solemn."

"He did n't used to be," Jerry observed. "These girls don't seem to be very enthusiastic, De Witt. What sort of chap is he?"

Preston tossed away his cigarette with a man-of-the-world gesture.

"Why, a very good chap, very good little chap," he said patronizingly. "Plays a nice game of golf."

"We may be able to play to-morrow," said Jerry. "You telephone Budd, Marion, and if we can't get him, scare up some one else."

As Marion and Jerry drove away from the club, Marion confessed her defeat.

"I ordered a box of balls put in your locker,"

she said. "I hand it to you as lady charmer."

Jerry roared with delight.

"My dear," he said, "I can't take the balls. You were up against a brace game. I came back on the same ship with the lady. We had it all fixed."

Open-mouthed, Marion gazed at him, then a woman's first thought came to her.

"Do you mean you are dashing in seriously?"

"Do you think I 'd have a chance?" he answered, laughing.

"I don't know what to think, except that you 're certainly a fox."

"Well, I 'll tell you again, as I told you the other day, that I have no idea of marrying anybody; but I also announce that I don't think De Witt will do for Grace, not by a long shot. There 's a lot of good in that girl, and if I 've got Preston's number correctly, he 's a counterfeit."

"Between you and me I think so, too," said Marion, "but all the same I 'll bet you she marries him. He 's a good deal cleverer than you think he is."

"I 'll bet she does n't," he answered. "I can't see Preston in any light. He 's the last man that could worry me if he was bucking my game with a girl."

The car stopped in front of the house. As they got out Jerry said:

"By the way, I forgot to tell you I engaged a new office attendant this afternoon. You see, Emile does n't like that kind of work, and he 'll be a great deal more useful in the house."

"But there's nothing for him to do except valet you," said Marion.

"Oh, yes, there is," Jerry answered. "We ought to have a second man in the dining-room."

"But how did you happen to engage a new attendant? Where did you find him?"

"It's a woman," said Jerry. "A nurse. Every doctor ought to have a woman nurse in the office."

Marion shrugged her shoulders.

"I suppose you know your own business," she said.

CHAPTER VI

AS they were finishing dinner that evening, Bannock came in with a note and presented it to Jerry. Jerry asked permission to read it. Having read it, he put it into his pocket with an air of mystery and drank his coffee.

"Well," said Marion, "are n't you going to tell us what she says?"

"I'm afraid not," Jerry answered. "It's of a private nature."

Marion regarded him balefully.

"Our boy has made a hit with the ladies," she observed to her father. "He's a little above himself."

The colonel laughed. Jerry regarded her with an indulgent smile, and when they left the dining-room took his hat and went out. He returned about half past nine and without comment upon his absence began to set the chess-board for a game with his father. No further reference was made to the note.

It was a quarter past ten the next morning when Jerry entered his office. He had hardly seated

himself when the new office attendant came in. She was dressed even more simply than the day before, but there was color in her cheeks, and her eyes glowed with excitement.

"There is a patient to see you," she said. "He did n't want to wait. In order to keep him occupied, I took the liberty of filling out the index-card. I hope I did right."

"You did, indeed," said Jerry. He seemed to feel no surprise at the idea of the waiting patient. "I hope Emile explained things and made you comfortable?"

"Oh, yes," she answered. "He was very good."

"And you think you're going to like your work?"

"I know I am," she answered. Their eyes met, and her color heightened a little. Her enthusiasm amused him, but he made no comment.

"Well," he said, "you'd better show Mr. Woodbridge in."

As he said the name, she glanced at him.

"Then you're expecting Mr. Woodbridge?"

He nodded.

"But don't let him know he was expected," he added.

"I understand," she said. She handed him the index-card and went out.

As he seated himself at the desk he glanced at the card and smiled.

"That girl is certainly quick at getting an idea," he thought.

A moment later Mr. Budd Woodbridge was standing before him, nervously crumpling his handkerchief in the palm of his hand.

Jerry looked up, registering, as they say, recognition.

"Why, Budd Woodbridge!" he exclaimed. "This is a pleasant surprise! It's years and years since I've seen you!" He rose, and held out his hand.

"Yes, it's a long time," said Budd.

"Is this a social occasion," asked Jerry, "or something professional?"

"Professional, I guess," said Budd, gloomily. He sat down on the edge of the chair. "There's nothing the matter with me, but mother made me promise to come. You won't find anything. They've all had a try at me."

"Well, it won't do any harm to try again, will it?"

"No," said Budd, doubtfully. "If it amuses you, go ahead."

"Have n't much confidence in the medical profession, eh?"

Budd grinned dolefully.

"I don't blame you," said Jerry. "Now, what seems to be the matter?"

"There's nothing the matter," said the patient, hopelessly.

"Eat well? Sleep well?"

Budd eyed him suspiciously.

"Not very," he said. "Mother has n't been telling you a lot of worry stuff?" he added.

"Certainly not," said Jerry with emphasis. "What put that into your head?"

"Oh, I don't know," the boy answered. "I've lost a little weight and I've been kind of nervous, and mother thinks I'm sick. It makes me tired."

"Perhaps you are, perhaps you are n't," said Jerry, sagely. "That's what we're going to find out. Unless you object, we'll go over you."

"Go ahead," said Budd, resignedly.

Jerry produced a thermometer from the drawer, washed it ceremoniously, and placed it under the patient's tongue.

"You see, the modern theory of medicine, which is pretty well borne out by facts," he observed, "is that you and I are sort of continents inhabited by billions of assorted germs. A few of them we know, most of them we don't, though we're learning new ones every day. When some of the bad

ones start something, it is n't always easy to say just what is doing, but a good many of them signal their activities with more or less rise of temperature. Hence the object which is now in your mouth." Though he talked carelessly, he was watching the boy with keen eyes.

"But I tell you I 'm all right," mumbled Budd.

Jerry nodded, looked at his watch, and presently extracted the instrument. The mercury stood at normal.

"That is interesting," said Jerry.

Budd glanced at him nervously.

"Anything doing?"

Jerry made no reply, but went to an instrument case, and returned with a sounding-hammer.

"Coat off and waistcoat, please," he commanded.

Budd removed his garments, and Jerry began to rap upon his chest, listening closely to the dull, thud-like sounds that resulted. He finished this operation and regarded his patient sternly.

"Cough much?" he inquired.

"Only when I have a cold. I have n't had one since spring."

"I thought not. Now we 'll go a step further." He took the hammer back to the case, and returned with a stethoscope. He put his patient in the operating-chair and went to work. He finished,

made notations upon the card, and took the blood pressure.

"You say your weight is off?" he demanded suddenly.

Budd nodded.

"How much?"

"About ten pounds."

"Since when?"

"The last month or so, since I have n't been sleeping very well."

"Never been very fat, eh?"

"No."

"Let me see your tongue."

A red tongue was exhibited.

"Um," said Jerry, professionally. "Ever take out any life insurance?"

A faint flush came into the boy's pale face. He nodded.

"You passed all right?"

"Yes."

"When were you examined?"

"About three months ago."

"Um," said Jerry again. He rose, paced the length of the room and back, and then, telling the patient that he would be back in a few moments, disappeared into the operating-room.

Now, Jerry's reason for disappearing into the

operating-room was that he wanted to think. Simulation of thought in the presence of the patient got him no nearer finding out what was the matter with Budd Woodbridge. Thermometer, stethoscope, sounding-hammer, and tongue all indicated that nothing was the matter. The verdict of four other doctors who had used these and other means of diagnosis was to the same effect. Yet Jerry believed that the diagnosing instruments and the other doctors were wrong. It was merely an intuition, a "hunch"; yet there were certain facts to back it. In the first place, Budd had lost ten pounds in the past three months. In the second, Mrs. Woodbridge, who had sent for him the evening before on the advice of Mrs. Tyler, was thoroughly alarmed. She said that in the past three months Budd had changed from a cheerful, normal, fun-loving boy to something utterly different. He slept little, picked at his food, shunned company, and wore his nerves on the surface. She was a sensible, intelligent woman, and her conclusions could not be dismissed as the fancies of an excited mother. Admitting the change in his condition, something must have caused it. The question was to find out that something. Jerry's first thought was that the boy had been gambling in the stock-market and had perhaps put up securities

that he had no right to take. But it appeared that this had been the theory of Dr. Kale, the family physician, and investigation proved it baseless. Mrs. Woodbridge was more than well off, and Budd had the income of a generous trust fund on his own account. Nor could a clue be found either in bad habits or an entangling alliance. Budd was a model young man.

As he stood in the operating-room gazing blankly at the wall Jerry forgot that he was a practising physician, which had always seemed to him a rôle involving humbug. He was merely himself, Jerry Sumner, very much interested in working out a perplexing human problem. He continued to gaze at the wall, but the wall was in no wise helpful. Suddenly he squared his shoulders, crossed to the door that led into the attendant's room, and passed through. The new attendant looked up from the nurse's manual that she was poring over and rose respectfully.

"Miss Xelva," he said, "if you were a doctor, what would you say was the matter with that young man?" He nodded toward the private office.

Miss Xelva's mild, wondering eyes fixed on him as if to make sure that she was not being made game of.

"But I'm not a doctor," she answered. "My opinion would be worth nothing."

"That's not the question," said Jerry. "If you have an opinion, I'd like to hear it."

"Well, it seems very clear to me," she answered, "that the young man is suffering from some worry, very likely an unhappy *affaire de cœur*."

Jerry regarded her with amazement.

"You mean the boy's in love?" he demanded.

"That is what I should say. You can see he is unhappy."

"But you don't really think being in love can make a healthy man lose ten pounds beside his sleep and appetite?"

"It might," she answered. "It would depend on his attitude of mind, I should think."

He looked at her keenly and laughed.

"That's beyond me," he said. "It's not my idea of love."

"Of course, I am very likely wrong," she answered demurely. "It was only my opinion. You asked for it."

"Well, of course, I'm very much obliged to you for it." He turned on his heel and went back to his patient. There were only two courses open: either to confess that he did n't know what the mat-

ter was, or to stall along on the chance of thinking it out. He decided on the latter. To gain time he said, "Budd, I want to take your pulse before I go any further."

Without speaking, Budd extended his hand. Jerry took it and opened his watch. The pulse appeared to be a perfectly good pulse. Jerry counted its beats through a quarter of a minute, then went on to the half. Ordinarily he would have stopped here. He was satisfied with its being normal, but there was nothing else to do so he kept on. Just as he passed the three-quarter mark, the door opened softly, and Miss Xelva appeared.

"Miss Grace Tyler would like to speak with you on the telephone," she said.

Jerry nodded, but made no move. At the mention of Miss Tyler's name Budd's pulse had shot up. There was no doubt about it. In the succeeding five seconds the beats almost doubled. Then they began uncertainly to fall off.

"Tell Miss Grace Tyler," Jerry said, "that I'll call up in five minutes."

Up shot Budd's pulse again. Jerry watched him out of the corner of his eye. The boy's mouth was set; drops of moisture were on his forehead though the day was cool. Jerry did some quick thinking.

"Oh, Miss Xelva," he called, "has Mr. Preston De Witt rung me up this morning?"

Up shot the pulse again.

"No," said Miss Xelva, returning.

"That 's all," said Jerry. At the end of the next quarter-minute he released Budd's hand. If he wanted time to think before, he wanted it even more now. It was hard to believe, but Miss Xelva was undoubtedly right. Budd was in love with Grace Tyler, and the name of Preston De Witt affected him as the red rag is supposed to affect the bull. But how to treat such a situation medically was a question. Moreover, he was uncertain whether he wanted to treat it. He knew he was not in love with Grace Tyler himself, but he was not sure that he did n't want to be, or that he might n't end up by being. She was an uncommonly attractive girl. As he put his watch back into his pocket he thought of a plan to postpone action.

"Budd," he said, "I 'm all through with you to-day except for one thing. I want to take a blood test. Come into the operating-room."

Five minutes later Budd departed with an appointment for the next morning when he was to be informed of the result.

CHAPTER VII

THERE was to be a dance that night at the Ludlows', and Gertrude Ludlow had sent word to Marion to bring Jerry, dead or alive. Jerry, however, had stood out against it. He was not a dancing man. After Budd had left the office, he called up Grace Tyler, and the first thing she asked him was whether or not he was coming to the dance.

"I guess it's nothing doing," he answered. "I can't manage these new steps. I'd feel out of it."

"But I'll teach you," she suggested. "You'll learn in five minutes."

"Yes, I know about that," he retorted. "I'd have a great chance. You'd be so busy you'd forget you ever knew me. We'll talk it over this afternoon when we play that return match. By the way, why not get Woodbridge to play with Marion? I don't believe he's too sick for a little golf."

And then a blow fell. Grace could n't play that afternoon. She had to take her mother motoring. That was why she had telephoned.

After Jerry had rung off he decided that he had made a mistake in turning down the dance. As

soon as Budd had gone he had planned to get him for golf and watch him with Grace. He felt that seeing them together would help to clarify the situation. If he could believe that Budd had a chance to beat out De Witt, he would declare himself out of the running and help the boy play his hand. If not, he would wash his hands of Budd and give Preston a rub on his own account. With the golf match off, there was no chance of making the observations he wanted before Budd came back to him as a patient. At lunch he announced to Marion that he had changed his mind about the dance. He would go.

"I suppose Grace has been using the telephone," said Marion with a sisterly smile.

"Right as usual," said Jerry.

At half past eleven that evening Jerry had been introduced to eleven girls, had danced three waltzes in the English manner without reversing, and for ninety minutes had been watching the door through which the guests entered Mrs. Ludlow's ball-room. No Grace Tyler had appeared.

For an equal length of time Mr. Budd Woodbridge had been going through much the same program. Toward the end of the period Jerry had taken to watching Budd instead of the door. It amounted to the same thing and also gave him a

chance to study his patient, as it were, under fire. A little before midnight he saw Budd disappear and, acting on impulse, decided to follow him. He entered the dressing-room as Budd was leaving with his coat and hat, and reached the street as he passed under a street lamp half a block away. To go directly home, Budd should have turned to the right at the corner. But Budd turned to the left. Jerry also turned to the left, wondering what was in the boy's mind. He did not have long to wait before finding out. At Putnam Street Budd turned again and presently stopped before a house that was still lighted. In front of the house, which Jerry recognized as Mrs. Tyler's, stood a motor-car. When Budd stopped, Jerry had stopped also. When Budd went on, he, too, went on and, coming to the motor-car, recognized it as a runabout belonging to Preston De Witt. What had happened was obvious. Grace had told Budd she was coming to the dance and had chucked him for Preston.

Whatever doubts Jerry may have had before of the accuracy of the diagnosis based upon the pulse episode of the morning, they were now settled. The boy was in love. Miss Xelva had been right. Just how much encouragement Budd had received, Jerry, of course, could not say, but he surmised that

there must have been considerable, and that being the case, there was no doubt that he had just been handed a pretty rough deal. His own hour and a half made him appreciate the roughness. His sympathy for the boy increased as he thought about it, and before he got home he decided to take the case. He had some theories about the management of ladies of Grace's type. Moreover, there was too much good in her to let her throw herself away on a selfish, cold-blooded proposition like De Witt. He believed he might be helpful to both sides. He let himself in with his latch-key, and went up to bed wondering how he would open up the subject with Budd. It was the kind of thing that a woman older than Budd might have done gracefully enough, but he was not an older woman. Just as he was dropping off to sleep, an idea came to him, and he chuckled audibly.

Promptly at ten o'clock the next morning Jerry was in the office. At five minutes past ten Budd was ushered in. He looked pale and haggard as if he had passed an extremely unhappy night.

"I came in," he said, "because I promised that I would, but if you don't mind, I think I'll go. I have got a little headache and I think the air will do me good."

"Not interested in the result of the blood test?" said Jerry, casually.

Budd laughed mirthlessly.

"There's nothing the matter with me. You as much as said so yourself yesterday."

"Nothing the matter? You've lost ten pounds; you've got insomnia; your appetite's gone; you're so nervous you can't sit still, and yet you say nothing is the matter with you?"

"Well, there's nothing a doctor can do."

Jerry looked at him keenly, and Budd dropped his eyes.

"You're sure of it, eh?"

"Sure."

"Would you like to make a bet on it?"

"You'd lose your money, Doctor."

"I'm willing."

"Then you really think there's a medical treatment that would help me?"

"I don't *think*. I *know*."

"You're wrong," said Budd. "I know what's the matter with me. It is n't anything that drugs can help."

"I know what's the matter with you, too," said Jerry, "and it is something that medicine can help."

"You're wasting your time," said Budd. "I think I'll be going." He started for the door.

"Just as you say," said Jerry, "but remember, you promised your mother to put yourself under my care if I said I could help you. Yesterday I was n't sure. To-day, since I've made the blood test, it's different. I can help you. You're not going to back out?"

Budd looked at him suspiciously.

"What sort of a treatment will it mean?" he demanded. "How long will it take?"

"That depends on several things," Jerry answered, "but chiefly on how conscientiously you carry out my instructions."

Budd sat down, with his hat on his lap.

"Now, my son," continued Jerry, "in the first place I've got to ask you certain personal questions. You know a doctor has to do that kind of thing."

Budd nodded.

"Before I begin I want you to promise me that you'll answer me truthfully and not get mad."

"That's all right."

"That means you will?"

"Certainly."

Gerald pushed the box of cigarettes toward him and helped himself.

"Now the first question," he began, "is a simple

one. I want to know how long you have been in love with Grace Tyler."

The boy stiffened in his chair and gazed at Jerry, his face crimson.

"Who told you that?" he stammered.

"No one has told me anything, my dear boy," said Jerry, calmly, "except yourself."

"But I've never told any one."

"You seem to forget that I've been examining you inside and out, and that I've taken a culture of your blood. After all, modern medicine is able to do something, you know."

Budd looked at him with something like awe, and Jerry had to cough to preserve his composure.

"Now be good enough to answer my second question. How long has this thing been going on?"

Budd flushed again.

"I should say ever since I met her."

"First sight?"

Budd nodded.

"Well, how long ago did you meet her?"

"Something over a year ago; the twenty-fourth of last August, to be exact."

Jerry made a note on the card.

"Now," he said, "there's another question which I want you to answer with equal directness. Does Grace Tyler love you?"

"Is that necessary?" Budd stammered.

"I understand. But I've got to know. You are here as a patient, not as a gentleman."

"Well," said Budd, with an effort, "I think she did."

"And now she does n't?"

"It seems that way. I think I bore her," he added miserably.

"And how long have you seemed to bore her?" demanded Jerry, relentlessly.

The boy made no reply, but turned his head, and Jerry saw that his eyes were brimming with tears. He rose and walked round the desk and laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"I know how it is," he said imaginatively. "It's hell! I've been through it myself often, but, old boy, you must n't let it get the best of you."

Budd sprang to his feet.

"Doctor, it has got the best of me!"

"Nonsense!" said Jerry, sharply. "This is no way to go on!"

"Do you think I don't know that?" cried Budd. "I know well enough that I ought to be a man about it, that if she does n't care for me any longer, I ought to keep away from her, but, Doctor, I just *can't*. Can't you understand it?"

"Of course I can understand it," said Jerry,

falsely. "But understanding it won't help you any more than giving in to it against your better judgment. We've got to get down to facts in this world."

Budd nodded miserably.

"But tell me," Jerry continued, "when did you find out that she had stopped caring for you?"

"I don't know exactly, but I've felt it coming on for quite a while, ever since—"

"Well," said Jerry, "ever since what?"

"Since there's been another man."

"So there's another man, eh? Who?"

"Preston De Witt."

"Tell me about it," said Jerry.

"Well, ever since he began coming around, I've felt a change. I didn't think much of it at first, but then they were together more and more, and after a while she seemed to prefer him. I made up my mind over and over again that the only decent thing for me to do was to get out of her way. But I couldn't help hanging around just the same. Why, I keep telling myself I won't go near her when I am on my way to her house. And all the time I know perfectly well what an idiot I'm making of myself. And when I'm with her, my attempts to conceal this damned jealousy and appear

light-hearted and jolly—well, you can imagine how successful they are!” He paused, and his manner changed. A quiet intensity came into his eyes as he continued. “And now little by little in spite of myself I’ve begun to hate him! No matter how I fight against it, I can’t keep him out of my mind. At times I imagine I see him somewhere alone, standing and waiting,—and I try to hold back and keep from springing on him and then,—she’s there, coming down a path, and before I know it I have him by the throat, strangling the life out of him, strangling him, do you understand?”

“You’ve got this pretty bad,” said Jerry.

Budd sank back in his chair as if exhausted by his vehemence and abashed that he should have unbosomed himself.

“I have got it pretty bad,” he answered, with a sickly smile. “I told you I was a damned fool.”

“You’re up against a tough game,” said Jerry, sympathetically, “awfully tough. However, if you will fall in love, you’ve got to be prepared for trouble. But there’s no need to call yourself names. Under the circumstances I think you’ve behaved remarkably well.”

Budd snorted contemptuously.

"I know how I've behaved—like a sniveling school-boy. Why, if I were any good, do you think I'd have told you all this?"

"You did n't tell me," Jerry answered. "You only answered the question I put to you. I'd found out myself."

"Look here," Budd demanded, "you don't mean to try and put it over that by looking at my tongue or examining a drop of blood you could tell I was in love with Grace Tyler? I've been going around making an exhibition of myself, letting every one know. That's what I've been doing. What I need is a nurse."

Jerry looked at him smilingly. An idea just struck him.

"It's quite likely that we will get you one," he said.

"And a rattle and a baby-carriage and a bottle," Budd continued bitterly. "I'm not worth your trouble, Doctor."

"Steady, boy," said Jerry, kindly. "There's no use running yourself down. No one suspects this thing but myself, and no one knows about it unless you or Grace Tyler have told him. You say you have n't, and I'm pretty sure she has n't. You don't understand what the examination of a drop

"You've got this pretty bad," said Jerry



THE
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of blood can tell about a man. I'm not going into details that you would n't understand, but you have my word for it that no one has told me a thing about you and Grace except my instruments and yourself."

"Well," said Budd, "there's a certain amount of cold comfort in that, but it does n't help very much. I don't suppose there's any use in my staying on and talking you to death. Now that you really know what my trouble is, of course that cure bet is off."

"That cure bet is very much on," Jerry answered. "I can cure you if you want to be cured and will do as I say."

Budd smiled incredulously.

"I wish I could believe that," he said, "but I don't."

"I repeat," said Jerry, "I can cure you if you are willing to place yourself in my hands for just one month."

"What would you want me to do?"

"Whatever I tell you."

Budd was silent, thinking.

"Would it mean that it was all over with—" He hesitated.

"It might," said Jerry.

The boy looked at him piteously.

"It's pretty tough," he muttered. "Could I have a little time to think it over?"

"You can have till to-morrow at half past two," said Jerry. "At that time I shall have the serum ready, and if you want to sign on, I'll give you the first treatment."

"The serum?" Budd repeated.

"That's what I said," Jerry answered gravely. "It's a new thing that they've worked out in Paris for cases like yours."

"Well," said the boy, "I'll come in to-morrow at half past two and let you know what I've decided."

"Good!" said Jerry. He gave Budd a hearty shake of the hand, and the boy departed. A few minutes later Jerry touched the bell, and Miss Xelva came in.

"You still want to be a nurse?" he demanded.

She looked at him in mild wonder.

"Why, yes," she answered.

"Well," he said, "unless I miss my guess I'll have a case for you to-morrow."

"But am I competent to go on a case?" she asked.

He smiled.

"I guess you're as competent a nurse as I am a doctor. Would you have any objections to taking care of Mr. Woodbridge?"

"Mr. Woodbridge," she repeated. "Is he ill enough for a nurse?"

"I think so."

"Then you found out what was the matter," she asked timidly.

He nodded.

She gazed at him admiringly.

"And you think you can cure him?"

"I 'm going to try, but it 's an awful disease."

"Is it right for me to ask what it is?"

"Perfectly. You ought to know. In plain English the disease is called jealousy."

"Jealousy?" she repeated.

"Plain, old-fashioned jealousy. You see, you guessed it yesterday."

"But how can a nurse be of any use trying to cure a young man of jealousy?"

Jerry gave her a quizzical look.

"May I ask a personal question? Have you ever been in love?"

She gazed at him with her frank, innocent eyes and shook her head.

"Then, of course, you don't know anything about it," he said. "I 'll explain."

"But jealousy can't be treated by a doctor," she insisted.

"By the family doctor, no. You are quite right.

But we specialists have some new ideas on the subject. You see modern, up-to-date medicine treats anything from measles to parricide with serums."

"But is there a serum for jealousy?" she asked incredulously.

"There will be by two-thirty to-morrow," he answered. "But don't think I'm not taking this case seriously," he added. "This boy is really in a dangerous condition. He's right on the brink of a nervous collapse, and all because he's got a girl on the brain. Your job and mine is to get her off. And the first thing to do is to give him something else to worry about even if we have to give him a new disease. And that's where the nurse comes in. Woodbridge must be made to believe that we're keeping a strict record of his condition. And all the time the nurse must be doing her best to amuse him and keep his mind constantly occupied. And believe me, that's just as worthy and difficult a job as nursing a patient through typhoid."

"You're good to give me the chance," she said. "I'd love to try it."

"Well, we'll try to work it out together. This afternoon I'll show you the things you'll have to use."

CHAPTER VIII

BUDD'S state of mind as he walked home from Jerry's office, to put it mildly, was confused. When he had gone to see Jerry, torn and anguished with the experience of the night before, he would have submitted cheerfully to anything that promised to remove Grace from his memory, even cerebral surgery. Now that Jerry assured him of a cure, he could not bring himself really to want it. He had the feeling that if he only gave her enough devotion, she would care for him in the end. Without her, life was utterly empty. Even since De Witt had come on the scene they had had delightful evenings together at which Budd would be translated to the seventh heaven and go away on fire with happiness. Then the next day something would happen: he would do or say something which Grace would resent and for a week he would nurse a bleeding heart. As he reached the corner and turned toward his mother's house, it flashed upon him that in some way it was all his own fault. He was too easily hurt; he demanded too much; he lacked the requisite patience. A girl as beautiful and perfect as Grace was a law unto herself. Who

was he to complain or criticize? He resolved to begin over again and be perfectly strong, perfectly patient, perfectly cheerful and devoted no matter what happened. He made a solemn vow to that effect.

As he turned down Connecticut Street an automobile horn squawked vehemently, and looking up, he saw Grace driving her mother's car and smiling radiantly at him. She drew up at the curb and waited for him. Budd's heart beat joyfully.

"Hello!" he called and dashed across the street.

"Want a lift?"

"I was just going home," he answered.

"Well, I wanted to see you about something," she said. "You've been very bad." She looked at him with a sort of coy motherliness. "You've been sick and have n't let me know about it."

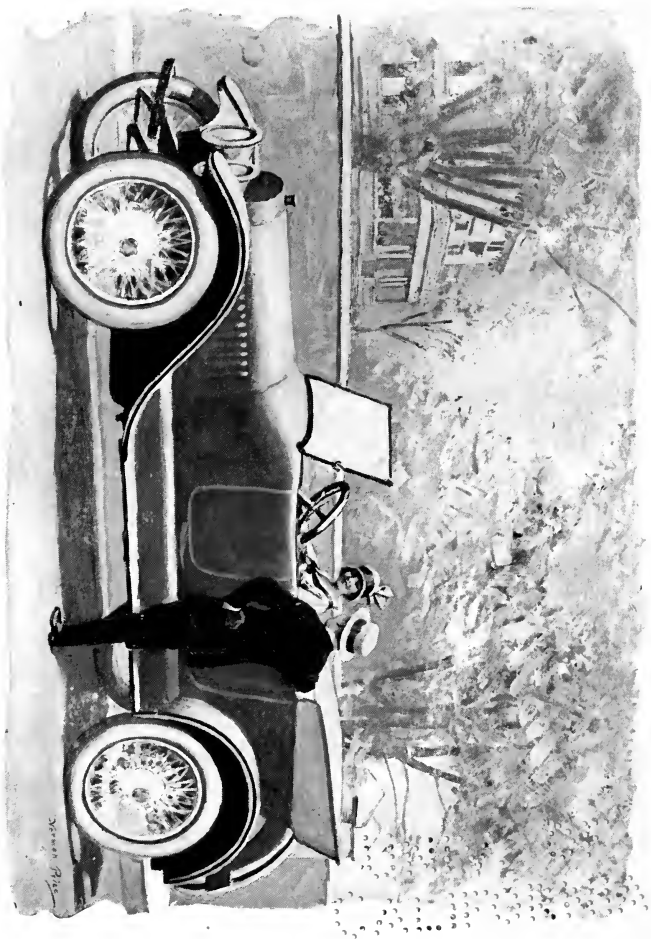
"It was nothing," he answered deprecatingly, "just a little cold."

"But it kept you from the office."

"Who told you that?" he demanded.

"Why, I think it was Preston," she answered. "We wanted you to make up a foursome."

At the name of Preston it was as if the sunlight had suddenly gone out. Budd stiffened. He remembered his newly made resolutions, however, and forced a sickly smile.



Budd's heart beat joyfully



"I was all right," he said. "It was just that mother thought I ought to stay home."

"Well, I'm glad of that," she said sympathetically. "I was getting worried. I had n't seen you for days and I wanted to thank you for the bridge scores. Where on earth did you get them? They were just what I wanted."

The sun began to come out again.

"I sent to New York for them," he answered. "I'm awfully glad they were right."

"Tell me about the party," she said smilingly. "I hear you left early."

The ice began to form again somewhere in Budd's interior.

"Yes," he said shortly.

"Was n't it fun?"

"I don't know," he answered. "I thought you were going to be there."

"I did expect to. Your flowers were too lovely, Budd."

"But why did n't you come?"

"I don't know. Somehow I did n't feel quite up to it. You know how one chucks at the last minute."

"Yes, I can understand," he said bitterly. The words had slipped out, and his resolutions were forgotten.

"What do you mean by that?" she demanded.

"I passed by your house on my way home," he said significantly.

"But that was n't on your way home."

"I went around that way to ask if you were ill."

"Did you come to see me last night?" she demanded.

"I did n't stop because I saw you were engaged. His runabout was outside."

"Well, what of that?"

"Nothing; only I knew then why you did n't come to the dance."

"But I 'd given up the dance long before Preston called. I had n't the slightest idea he was coming."

"But he must have known you 'd given it up."

The lines of Grace's mouth tightened.

"Now you're beginning again," she said sharply, "and, as I've told you, I won't stand it."

The boy looked at her miserably.

"I did n't mean to say anything," he faltered.

"Well, you did," she answered hotly. "You may not mean it, but you always do. And I tell you once more, I won't have it. I've a perfect right to do what I please and see whom I please. You said you understood that."

"I do understand it. But lately you seem to be with Preston all the time."

"That's not true," Grace exploded, "and you know it. And if it were, it's entirely my own affair. And I won't have you always reproaching me and making scenes."

She pressed her foot on the starter; the car shot forward, and Budd was left dumbly standing on the sidewalk, with a lump in his throat and his whole being numb with heartache.

The next day at half-past two he came into Jerry's office looking like the ghost of misery.

"I've decided," he said. "I'll do as you say."

Jerry suppressed a smile.

"That's the right spirit," he said cheerily. "In a month you won't know yourself. You'll be feeling like a two-year old."

Budd looked at him dismally, but said nothing.

"Well," Jerry went on, "we've got the serum ready." His hand went out to a small bottle of colorless fluid, that stood on the desk. "That's the stuff."

"But I can't see," said Budd, "how medicine can cure jealousy."

"That's natural," said Jerry, "and you can't see why because you don't know what's brought on the

jealousy. Now you think it's Preston De Witt, but it is n't. Preston De Witt never would bother you if it were n't that your nervous system had been attacked."

"By what?"

"Bugs," said Jerry, gravely. "Germs, microbes, millions of them. They get you down, and that's what made you nervous, and your neurasthenia, as we call it professionally, made you jealous. If you were in a normal condition, as I am, for example, you would n't know what jealousy was. You would never give Preston a second thought. You'd snap your fingers at him."

Wonder tinged with envy showed in Budd's gaze, and it was hard for Jerry to keep a straight face.

"I wish I were like you," he said.

"You will be after we get through with you," said Jerry. He touched the bell, and Miss Xelva answered it. "We're all ready," he said.

Miss Xelva disappeared, and Jerry took a medicine-dropper, filled it from the vial of colorless liquid, and dropped three drops in a glass of distilled water.

The boy watched him eagerly and suddenly burst into hysterical laughter ending with a kind of sob.

"There go the bugs at work on your old nerves," said Jerry.

"It 's the idea of my being full of germs," said Budd, controlling himself. "It 's funny."

"Everybody 's full of 'em," continued Jerry, putting the cork back into the vial. "Most of them, you see, are harmless, but you've got some bad ones. But we'll knock 'em out. Now, the treatment may be a little hard for you, especially at first. Do you think you can stand it?"

"I'll stand anything if it cures me. The harder the better."

"That 's the way to go at it," Jerry said encouragingly. "Do you drink?"

"Not much."

"Smoke?"

"Yes; quite a little."

"You must cut 'em both out. You must n't even look at a high-ball. Why, one teaspoonful might spoil the effect of all the microbes in that glass, something like three hundred millions."

"You're going to put microbes in me?" Budd asked.

"Billions of them to fight your nerve bugs. That 's the principle of modern medicine."

Budd gazed at him in awe.

"All right," he said meekly.

"Now, the next most important thing after cutting out drink and tobacco is exercise. Exercise and the course I'm going to lay out for you gives our beneficent organisms the proper chance to do their work. You must be up every morning at six, rain or shine, and take half an hour at a brisk dog-trot. Then a cold shower and breakfast! In the forenoon two hours' work in the gymnasium and no loafing about it. After lunch a long walk, six or seven miles, and in the evening if you feel up to it, a short go at the punching-bag, another bath, and bed. In other words, all the exercise you can stand and"—he paused impressively—"for one month absolutely no social engagements. Do you know what I mean by that?"

"Keep away from—her?"

"Exactly, and from all your friends."

The door opened, and Miss Xelva came in with a surgeon's tray on which were a lighted alcohol lamp, a hypodermic syringe, a bottle of alcohol, absorbent cotton, forceps, and other instruments.

"And now we'll go ahead with the serum," Jerry continued. "Take your coat off, roll up your shirt-sleeve, and lie down in the operating-chair."

While Budd was obeying instructions, Miss Xelva deftly disinfected the hypodermic needle in

the flame and filled the syringe from the solution in the tumbler. Then with a piece of cotton soaked in alcohol she rubbed the spot on Budd's arm where the injection was to be made. As she finished she glanced up furtively, and Jerry nodded approval.

"I'm going to have Miss Xelva do this," Jerry explained, "because she will give you your daily treatments. All ready, Miss Xelva. It won't hurt you," he added. "Just a quick jab, twitch it out, and it's all over."

The girl set her mouth, took the syringe in one hand and Budd's arm in the other.

"I do hope it won't hurt," she said sympathetically.

"I don't mind," said Budd.

"You won't hurt him if you jab it quickly," said Jerry.

Budd closed his eyes as if he had been facing a firing-squad; the girl, pale, but determined, suddenly pressed the needle home, and the deed was done.

"Was it very bad?" she asked excitedly.

Budd opened his eyes.

"I did n't feel it."

"It's nice of you to say so," she murmured.

"Come along," said Jerry. "Press it down

slowly—give it time. That's the way! Splendid! Now out quickly! That's very neatly done, Miss Xelva."

She wiped the spot with the cotton and proceeded to rub it with the palm of her hand.

"Feeling a little dizzy?" Jerry asked.

"No," said Budd, doubtfully. "I don't think so."

"You will. Getting several million germs pumped into you is quite a shock, but it will pass off presently. I would n't try to stand up just yet. You should always lie down for five minutes after each treatment. Miss Xelva will help you into the operating-room, and you lie down on the couch."

"But I feel all right," said Budd.

"Better submit to assistance," Jerry suggested. "Think of those bugs and don't take any chances."

Five minutes later Jerry went into the operating-room.

"Feeling all right?" he asked. "Dizziness passed off?"

The boy sat up.

"I really don't think I felt any," he answered. "If I did, I did n't know it."

"That's splendid," said Jerry. "You're going to react favorably. I can see the treatment will succeed. Now, you know yesterday we were

speaking of a nurse for you. Well, I've arranged for one."

Budd's face fell.

"I have n't got to have a nurse, have I?"

"It's absolutely essential," said Jerry, impressively. "I would n't take the responsibility of the case without one. But no one need know about it. In fact it's better that no one should suspect that you are ill."

"I should prefer it that way," said Budd.

"Well, that's the way it will be," said Jerry. "If you don't go to the office or see people, that's your own affair. In a few days no one will think anything about it. Miss Xelva will go on the case. She's a very capable woman. I'll arrange about it with your mother. You won't need her during the day, but it will be best to have her live at your house and see that you get up in the morning and go through your work. Also she'll keep your chart. During office hours she'll be here as usual and will give you your serum treatment."

"Just as you say, Doctor," said Budd.

"And now," said Jerry, "as a parting word remember the bugs that have been making all this trouble, and help the good little microbes that are working for you to win. In a month you'll have forgotten what it was to be jealous."

"I don't suppose," said Budd, timidly, "that you have ever been jealous yourself."

Jerry laughed.

"I'm afraid that's an experience I shall never have, Budd. I just naturally happen to have good nerves. But you will, too, and you'll laugh to think that a fellow like Preston De Witt could ever have given you a bad night."

Budd gazed at him admiringly and departed.

When Jerry was alone he rang the bell for the office attendant.

"You were bully," he said, "went through it without a hitch."

"I can never thank you enough for taking so much trouble to teach me," she answered. "It must be wonderful to know as much as you do."

Jerry laughed.

"If we had a show-down," he said, "you'd find out that I know just as much about doctoring as you do about nursing."

She looked at him a little shocked, as if he had uttered a mild blasphemy.

"It's the truth," he went on. "This is my first case, just as it's yours, and I'm depending on you to help me put it through. Together I think we can do it, but during the next month most of the work will fall on your shoulders. To-night you'll go

to the Woodbridges'. I'll see Mrs. Woodbridge this afternoon. She's a very nice woman and will, I know, make you comfortable."

A shadow crossed the girl's face.

"Then I'm not to come here to-morrow?"

"Why, of course you're to come," he answered. "Did n't you understand that? Your duties won't interfere with our office hours."

"I'm glad of that," she said. She gave a sigh of relief and dropped her eyes.

"Now I've explained to you about keeping his chart," he went on. "You really won't have to do much except put the thermometer in his mouth and write ninety-eight and two fifths. Is there anything else you want to know?"

"There's one thing," she said anxiously. "I'm awfully afraid I'll make some mistake in giving him his serum. Suppose I give him too much?"

"Don't let that worry you," said Jerry. "The serum is distilled water with three drops of distilled water added to it."

She looked at him in amazement and then burst out laughing.

"You see there are tricks in every trade but ours," said Jerry. Mentally, he was making note of the way she laughed. In a long experience he had observed that few women are attractive

when they laugh. This girl was one of the few.

"I feel very much relieved," she said. "I was afraid I might kill him."

"No danger of that, you see, but in any case I'd take a chance on you. The way you take hold of this thing is amazing. Have n't you ever done anything of this kind before?"

"A very little," she answered, "and only as an amateur, but it interests me."

She went back to her little room where her desk was, and a moment later he heard her speaking to Emile in French. He went to the door and listened. French evidently was as much her native tongue as English.

"I wonder what brought that girl to Elmford," he said to himself. "There's something odd about it. A girl with Paquin clothes and a Cartier watch is n't usually found looking for a chance to take care of a doctor's office in Elmford, Connecticut."

PART III



CHAPTER IX

THE establishing of Miss Virginia Xelva at the Woodbridges' in the capacity of trained nurse was not so simple a matter as Jerry had anticipated. As soon as Budd left the office, Jerry telephoned Mrs. Woodbridge and arranged to see her privately after lunch. He suggested that Budd be got out of the house, and Mrs. Woodbridge said she would invent a business errand. Shortly after two he received word that the coast was clear, and he set out for the Woodbridges'. His announcement that he had made a satisfactory diagnosis of Budd's condition and could promise a probable cure was received by Mrs. Woodbridge with almost tearful gratitude. The nature of the diagnosis, however, he kept to himself, explaining merely that he had found a nervous condition which, he was confident, would yield to treatment. Then he broached the subject of the nurse, and to his surprise met with immediate opposition. Mrs. Woodbridge wanted to take care of Budd herself.

Jerry shook his head solemnly.

"I'm sorry," he said, "but I can't take the re-

sponsibility unless I have a nurse on the case."

"But if we have a trained nurse in the house," she answered, "everybody in Elmford will know that Budd is ill, and you know how that will annoy him."

"It is n't necessary that anybody should know. You can explain her as a secretary or companion."

"But is the nurse you are sending the kind of person that I can take into the house in that way?" she demanded.

"Of course I only know her as a nurse," Jerry answered, "but she is a lady, quite young and, I suppose, rather pretty. Naturally a doctor does n't think of that sort of thing in regard to nurses."

Mrs. Woodbridge still hesitated.

"If you're afraid of her having designs on Budd's young affections," he said, "I don't think there's any ground for it. In my opinion he's safe for the present."

She shot him a quick look.

"You think he's interested in some one already?"

"You ought to know better than I do," Jerry answered, not altogether ingenuously.

"I had an idea that he was," she answered, "but since he's been ill he's been very strange. He's seen very little of her."

"So much the better," said Jerry. "My advice is that Budd shall see nothing of *her*, if there is a *her*, or any of his old friends for a month at least. In fact, that is part of the treatment that I have prescribed. For this reason it is all the better that there should be some young person in the house that he can talk to. He must be kept as cheerful as possible, and every effort made not only to break with old associations, but to establish new ones."

"I suppose you know best," said Mrs. Woodbridge, resignedly. "Does the nurse live in Elmford?"

"No," he answered, "she's a stranger."

Mrs. Woodbridge revived a little.

"I'm glad of that," she said. "There won't be any gossip. What is her name?"

"Xelva. Miss Virginia Xelva."

"Hardly an American name."

"I believe she is of foreign parentage."

"Of course you know all about her?" Mrs. Woodbridge asked significantly.

Miss Xelva's childlike blue eyes seemed to be turned on him. "Confound these suspicious women," he thought resentfully.

"I am ready to take full responsibility for her," he answered.

Mrs. Woodbridge sighed resignedly.

"Well, we shall be ready for her this afternoon," she said, and Jerry departed.

A little after four the subject of this discussion, having finished her office duties for the day, put on her hat and turned her steps toward Willow Street. Before a shabby, pretentious brick house she stopped and turned in. An iron deer stood at bay upon the neglected front lawn and bore out the general suggestion that the Perkins mansion had seen better days.

At the moment of Miss Xelva's approach Miss Perkins was visiting with Miss Twombly, for many years the star boarder, in the up-stairs front room. As the click of the front gate sounded, two pairs of eyes behind the muslin curtains were leveled at the approaching figure.

"Speaking of angels," said Miss Twombly, significantly.

"All I can say," observed Miss Perkins, as if repeating a remark just uttered, "is that she looks very much like a lady."

"But you admit you know nothing about her," said Miss Twombly, triumphantly. "You can't tell me that it's natural, or accidental for that matter, for a girl with clothes like that to appear in Elmford with seven trunks and take a position in

Gerald Sumner's office the same week that he gets back from eight years in Paris."

"I don't know why not," said Miss Perkins, weakly.

"You know perfectly well."

"But what can I do about it?" demanded Miss Perkins.

"That is for you to decide, Sarah," said Miss Twombly; "but if the responsibility were on my shoulders, I should certainly have a talk with her."

"But what can I say to her? She never goes out in the evenings."

"You can ask her where she comes from? She gets no mail."

"She gets one letter."

"With a French postmark on it," said Miss Twombly, scornfully. "It seems to me that if I were in your place I should have a plain talk with Addison Sumner."

"Perhaps I ought to," said Miss Perkins. "But she seems like such a sweet girl."

"Adventuresses all do. Of course it's not on my account. Thank goodness I'm old enough to look out for myself. But with three respectable young men boarding with you besides Anna Hawes you've got to know about the people you take into your house."

"I suppose that 's so," Miss Perkins said humbly. "I 'll sound her a little."

They listened as Miss Xelva came up-stairs and shut the door of her room.

"There 's no time like the present," said Miss Twombly. A few minutes later Miss Perkins, depressed and irresolute, withdrew to carry out her conscientious mission. Miss Twombly, grim and virtuous, went on with her knitting. Ten minutes later the door opened again, and Miss Perkins returned, obviously in triumph.

"Well?" said Miss Twombly, apprehensive lest all should be right.

"She 's going," said Miss Perkins, "that is, for a month. She wants to keep her room, leave her baggage, and pay her board just as if she was here."

"But I don't see that that 's finding out anything about her," said Miss Twombly, her wilted hopes rising.

"You 'd think so if you knew where she was going," said Miss Perkins. She paused as an orator pauses to obtain his effect, then added, "She 's going to Caroline Woodbridge's as a companion and secretary."

Miss Twombly was staggered, but not defeated.

"Caroline Woodbridge is a particular woman,"

she admitted, "but all the same I should feel more comfortable if I knew something about the girl. If I were in your place, I 'd certainly speak to her."

"If she 's good enough for Caroline Woodbridge to take into her house, I 'm satisfied," said Miss Perkins with spirit. "If you 're so anxious, you can speak to her yourself."

An hour later an expressman called for one of Miss Xelva's seven trunks, and shortly afterwards Miss Xelva followed it to the Woodbridge mansion.

Though, as Miss Twombly had said, Mrs. Woodbridge was indeed a particular woman, she was also a kind one. After she had reconciled herself to the idea of having a nurse in the house, there was no question in her mind about making the nurse welcome.

The September dusk was falling when Miss Xelva rang the bell and was ushered into the family living-room. The shades were drawn and the lamps lighted. As Mrs. Woodbridge came forward and extended her hand, the new-comer's face was in shadow.

"I am glad to see you," Mrs. Woodbridge was saying. "Dr. Sumner has told me pleasant things about you."

"I 'm afraid he 's told you more than was true," the girl answered.

"I'm not anxious about that," said Mrs. Woodbridge. "Do sit down."

As the girl seated herself the light fell upon her face. Mrs. Woodbridge started, and a little exclamation escaped her.

The girl looked up wonderingly. The older woman was still gazing at her.

"You look so much like an old friend," she said. "It gave me a shock as if I had seen a ghost."

The girl laughed softly.

"I seem to be one of the people who are always being taken for some one else," she answered. "You know there are such people. I suppose it shows that I have n't any character of my own."

Mrs. Woodbridge smiled.

"I don't think it shows that at all. Just the reverse. You have so much character that you're a little like every one else. But I must n't keep you now. We dine at half-past seven. I suppose you'd like to go to your room and get unpacked." She rang a bell, and a man servant appeared. "Hartley," she said, "please show Miss Xelva to her room and send Margaret to her."

Virginia hesitated, then turned, and held out her hand.

"Please let me thank you," she said, with a

little choke in her voice. "You are so good."

As she went out Mrs. Woodbridge followed her with her eyes. The contour of the slim figure, the way it moved, recalled more sharply than before that haunting resemblance that had startled her. A moment later, yielding to a mastering impulse, she went hurriedly up-stairs and knocked at the girl's door.

"Do you mind coming to my room for a minute?" she asked. "I want to speak to you. Margaret will unpack."

Miss Xelva followed her, wondering. The two women went into the room. The door closed behind them. An hour passed before Virginia came out again.

What took place between them they told no one, but at dinner Mrs. Woodbridge addressed the girl by her first name.

"You see," she said to Budd, "we've taken Virginia into the family."

If Miss Twombly had been witness to this scene, her mind might have been relieved. On the other hand, her suspicions might have been intensified, her theory being that really dangerous adventures wear the mask of virtue.

CHAPTER X

THE next morning Budd began his new régime. By six Virginia had taken his pulse and temperature for the chart, and he was out in flannels and a sweater for his half-hour's dog-trot. He came back somewhat out of breath, but glowing from the exercise, ready for his bath and breakfast. After breakfast and a half hour with the morning papers he got into flannels again and repaired to the old gymnasium that had been fitted up for him in the attic when he was a boy, and began working with chest-weights and dumb-bells. Jerry had prescribed a somewhat severe course of exercise, but Budd was young and muscular, and the physical work seemed from the beginning to relieve the emotional strain that he had been undergoing.

At eleven-thirty he appeared at Jerry's office, whither Virginia had preceded him for the day's office hours, and was given his serum treatment.

"I think you're looking better already," said Jerry, cheerfully. "Miss Xelva tells me that

you've taken hold like a bulldog. No bad results following yesterday's serum?"

Budd shook his head and grinned. Jerry's personality acted like a tonic. A man immune from jealousy and the weaknesses that ordinary mortals are subject to was a continuing inspiration.

"I'm getting along fine," he answered. "In a week I won't know myself, thanks to the microbes."

"Well, that's the way to look at it," said Jerry. "I think you're going to be a conscientious patient, and if you are n't, I've got a watch-dog to keep track of you. Miss Xelva has instructions to be merciless."

Budd grinned again at Virginia, who was disappearing with the tray on which reposed the miraculous serum and implements of inoculation.

"Do you think you are going to get along with her?" Jerry asked as she closed the door.

"Oh, fine!" said Budd. "You ought to see how mother has taken to her. Calls her 'my dear' and 'Virgie' already."

"Of course I knew she would," said Jerry, "but I'm glad to hear it." His gratification was deeper than his manner suggested. The truth was that after he had installed his office attendant with Mrs. Woodbridge he had had some misgivings. It had dawned upon him that it was one thing for a

bachelor doctor to engage an attractive young woman without references, but entirely another thing to place her in a household like Mrs. Woodbridge's. He had no doubts or suspicions himself. A girl with eyes like that could n't be anything but all right, but he realized that he could hardly expect Mrs. Woodbridge to see the matter from the same point of view if the facts had been explained to her.

"She fits in so well," Budd went on, "that I don't think even the servants suspect she's come to look after me. I've told Hartley that I'm going into training so as to be in shape to play hockey this winter, and that's all there is to it."

"That was a good idea," said Jerry, "and we'll have you ready for hockey or ten rounds with McGovern before the month is out. And as for old George Jealousy, you'll forget there was any such person."

Budd smiled and retired to the operating-room for the siesta that followed the serum.

When the door closed after him, Jerry's cheerful countenance became thoughtful. Inwardly he was not feeling the confidence he avowed. He realized that if Grace had ever cared for Budd in a serious way, his disappearance would shortly have its effect, and he believed that a girl like Grace would

not let him slip away from her without making some kind of effort to keep her hold on him. Of course, if she was seriously interested in Preston and had made up her mind to marry him, she might be glad to have Budd disappear, but Jerry was far from being convinced that such was the case. At all events, it was "her move," and he looked forward to it with more anxiety than he would have confessed. Budd's chances of getting what his heart wanted, if not of getting back his health, depended on it.

In the main Jerry's first impressions of Grace were being borne out. She had the making of a fine woman if the right man came along to develop her. But as he expressed it to himself, her trouble was that she was something more than a hundred per cent. female. Her curiosity as to the opposite sex was insatiable. She simply had to give everything that wore trousers the "once over" and investigate pretty thoroughly all that showed promise. It was all very well to call this the fundamental impulse of woman and the basis of feminine attractiveness, but with Grace it needed to be regulated. Given a free hand, it resulted in atrocities upon the male heart compared with which the cat's practices upon the canary were tenderness and consideration. If Budd could learn how to deal with

it and protect himself, all would be well. If not, he would be much better off blighted at once or even comfortably buried.

During the afternoon on the links Grace made no reference to his patient—an attitude which Jerry interpreted as a good sign. After the scene which Jerry divined had taken place, she would have been more apt to have made some reference to him if his three days' disappearance had not made an impression upon her.

The fourth day Budd's affairs were to some extent driven from Jerry's mind by a sudden and unexpected influx of new patients. The influx amount to only four, but by comparison it was none the less an influx. It appeared that Mrs. Woodbridge was responsible for it. She did a great deal of charitable work among the employees of the plow works of which her husband had been president, and as the result of her weekly visiting tour, a woman with a sprained wrist and a child with whooping-cough appeared at Jerry's office. He was also called by telephone to visit two sick people, the second of whom proved to be suffering with typhoid. The circumstance that they had no money to pay him added to his interest. To be helping people who needed help proved a new and agreeable experience.

Thus it happened that he was not in the office when Budd appeared for his treatment on the sixth day. He had slipped out a little after eleven to visit the typhoid patient. When he returned just after twelve he found Budd still waiting for him.

A glance at the boy showed that something had happened. His mouth was set. The old look was in his eyes.

"Well," said Jerry, cheerfully, "you seem to have something on your chest. What's new?"

"I promised you that I would n't see any of my old friends," Budd answered solemnly. "But what am I going to do about this?" He reverently laid on the desk a note in a handwriting that Jerry recognized, and began to pace the floor.

"Am I to read this?"

The boy nodded.

"'DEAR BUDD,'" Jerry began aloud: "'Where are you *keeping* yourself?'"

"It's 'where *are* you keeping yourself,'" corrected Budd. "She's got a line under the 'are.'"

Jerry gave him an amazed look and went on.

"'I've been afraid you were ill—and was so—'" He paused in difficulty over the next word, but was promptly assisted by Budd from the other side of the room.

"That word is '*glad*,'" he said. "It reads, 'I've been afraid you were ill and was so glad to hear you were out walking yesterday.'"

"Letter-perfect," observed Jerry, following the manuscript. Then he read on: "'I'm giving a bridge party Thursday evening, and you must come, As ever, GRACE.'" He paused thoughtfully. Grace had moved. This was her play.

"There's some more on the next page," said Budd. "'P. s. Come early.'"

Jerry turned the page, verified Budd's announcement, and smiled.

"You seem to have a fairly correct idea of the contents of this epistle," he observed. He tossed it back to Budd, who replaced it tenderly in his breast pocket. Jerry regarded him in silence, considering the situation. Obviously Grace was not ready to let Budd slip away; in all probability it indicated two things: first, that she was not engaged to Preston, and, also, that she liked Budd more than she allowed him to believe. At the same time if she could whistle him back like a dog whenever she pleased, the matter would be where it was a week ago. The trouble was that Budd gave every indication of being anxious to be whistled back.

"Well," said Jerry at last, "what is your idea about this party? Do you want to go to it?"

"Don't you think it might be a good thing? Just this once? I'm so much better you see—"

"Then your idea would be to write: 'DEAR GRACE: It is very good of you to think of me. I shall love to come'?"

"Something like that," said Budd. "It would show I was getting well again."

"The first person you'd meet would be Preston De Witt. Grace would be civil to him, and in five minutes you'd throw a fit and want to strangle him, and you'd ask Grace what she meant by having him at the party. She'd hand you some plain talk, and then you'd be back here on the run asking for a double dose of bugs. Is n't that right?"

Budd made no answer. His eyes brimmed, and he turned toward the window.

"No," said Jerry, kindly; "this is n't the time to accept invitations. This is our one best chance, Budd. The bugs for curing the jealousy are all right, but they can't do it all off their own bat. We've got to help 'em. Here and now you've got to learn the first principles of dealing with that most dangerous of animals, the female of our species. It is n't that my nerves are so much better than yours that I've escaped from your disease, but because I use a little common sense and realize what I'm up against."

"I suppose you're right," said Budd, despairingly, "only if you have n't any common sense what are you going to do?"

"Take the advice of a good doctor," said Jerry with a grin, "just as you're going to do. Now we'll attend to this correspondence of yours as it ought to be done. The great thing in a situation like this is to keep the other fellow guessing. If you come running when they whistle, it's all off, but if they're not sure about you, it adds interest. Never forget that the lady is a hunting animal and if you want to get along comfortably with her, it's a good thing to keep her busy hunting. My idea of an answer is something like this." He took a pencil and began to write on the scribble pad, reading aloud as he went along:

"'GRACE DEAR'—You see, you want to be friendly," he explained.

Budd smiled a sickly smile.

"'So nice to hear from you—don't count on me for Thursday, but you know I'll come if I can. Awfully busy. Affectionately and hurriedly, BUDD.'"

Budd listened without enthusiasm.

"Is that all?"

"It's enough. What do you think of it?"

"Well," said Budd, "it does n't sound very much like my letters."

"Of course it does n't. That's the point of it. Henceforth you're a new and different Budd, much less easily picked and, therefore, much more desirable. Some day you can explain to her how the nice little bugs have made you over into a new and wiser man."

"All right," said Budd, resignedly. "I'll copy it off." He took Jerry's draft and started for the door.

Jerry appeared to be lost in thought, but before Budd got out, he called him back.

"Just a minute," he said. "While we're at it we might as well get number two off our chests."

"Number two?" Budd asked in perplexity.

Jerry nodded.

"Yes, our next effort. You won't go to the party; so the day after it will be only civil to send a line calling attention to the fact in case she hasn't missed you." He wrote:

DEAR GRACE: Awfully sorry I missed the party. Can you forgive me? Terribly ashamed. Forgot all about it. BUDD.

Budd regarded him in shocked amazement.

"But what will she think!" he gasped.

"That 's what we are going to find out."

"But she 'll never speak to me again."

"Well, you wanted to be cured, did n't you?" said Jerry. "If she never speaks to you again, that 's one way of doing it; but it 's just possible that she won't take it that way. If by any chance you should hear anything from her, come in and tell me about it."

Budd sighed.

"She 'll never write me again," he faltered, and started for the door.

"Do you want to bet on that?" Jerry called after him, but there was no answer.

A week passed, and Budd's daily visits to the office were solely for the purpose of receiving the treatment administed by Miss Xelva. Jerry met him once as he passed through the hall to speak to a patient in the waiting-room and noted that he was looking well and seemed to have recovered from his temporary set-back. He had no time to stop and talk, for the waiting-room was half full of new patients. His success with the first four, not improbably assisted by the circumstance that he declined a fee from the family with the typhoid sufferer, sent the whole of Milltown flocking to his office; so for the first time in his life he was really

hard at work. The result was to drive Budd's problem to a certain extent out of his mind and make him rely on the favorable reports that Virginia brought him daily.

On the following Thursday, however, just after Budd had had his treatment, Virginia came in and announced that her patient wished to see him.

"Well," said Jerry, "I suppose you want to tell me you've been gaining weight. How much is it?"

"Five and three quarters this morning," Budd answered, "but that is n't what I want to tell you."

"Out with it, then. What is it?"

Budd grinned sheepishly.

"I've had another letter."

"What did I tell you?" said Jerry.

Budd grinned again. His hand went to his breast pocket, and he laid the missive on the desk.

Jerry opened it and read:

MY DEAR BUDD: You're a bad boy—and I'm dreadfully angry with you. But for once I'll forgive you—just because you've asked me to. Is n't that good of me? If you've nothing better to do drop in to-morrow for tea.

GRACE.

P. S. Be here at four. There are some people coming at five.

Jerry considered this epistle with a satisfaction which he made an effort to conceal.

"You see, I was right about her forgiving you," he said.

"I think it was awfully good of her," said Budd. "It was fearfully rude to write that I'd forgotten about the bridge party."

"It was," said Jerry, "and I've every hope that we'll make a real rude man of you yet, with the assistance of the good little bugs, but I suppose all this goodness has upset you again."

"No," said Budd; "only I really do think I ought to go just this once."

"I suppose so," said Jerry. He turned his eyes upward and gazed at the ceiling as if doing a problem in mental arithmetic.

"Just seeing her once could n't hurt me," Budd ventured. "I'm so much better now."

Jerry, apparently having solved his problem, turned on him suddenly.

"Do you know where she is at present?" he demanded.

Budd flushed guiltily.

"I saw her motoring out toward the country club about half an hour ago. She did n't see me. It was just as I was coming over here for my treatment."

"Good," said Jerry. He picked up the desk telephone. "What's her number?"

Budd gave it.

"Here," Jerry said as he handed him the instrument, "call up the house, ask for her, and when you find she's out, leave word that you can't possibly manage to get in to-morrow, but that you'll explain later."

Pain showed on the boy's countenance.

"But why should n't I go just this once?" he faltered. "It won't interfere with my walk."

Jerry picked up the letter again.

"I'll tell you why. Perhaps you did n't notice that she advised you to come at four because some people were coming in at five. Have n't you imagination enough to tell you who 'some people' means?"

For answer Budd took the instrument.

"Give me five four six three Elm," he told the operator.

"That's better," said Jerry and smiled approvingly while Budd spoke his piece and rang off.

"But when shall I explain why I can't come?" Budd asked.

"You're young," said Jerry. "You've got a lifetime to explain in. Don't be in a hurry about it. There is nothing that will interest Grace as

much as things that are unexplained. As I've told you, your job is not only to get well, but to become interesting."

Budd gazed at him, misery mingling with admiration.

"I wish I were like you," he said, and departed.

CHAPTER XI

ALTHOUGH Miss Xelva's installation at the Woodbridges entirely satisfied Miss Perkins as to the propriety of her social status, Miss Twombly clung to her doubts. Naturally she knew nothing of what passed between Mrs. Woodbridge and Miss Xelva on the evening of the latter's arrival, but she knew that she was much more a woman of the world than Miss Perkins and hence more responsible for the morals of the community. For the ten days following Miss Xelva's departure from the boarding-house she directed her morning walk up Elm Street in the hope of meeting Colonel Sumner. It so happened that she encountered him on the morning that Jerry had discussed with Budd Grace's invitation to tea. Just what passed between them or how she managed to satisfy her public-spirited conscience is immaterial, but that evening after Marion had gone to bed the colonel lit a fresh cigar and began with a diplomatic indirection which indicated that something was on his mind.

"Jerry," he said, "I want to tell you that the way

you've been taking hold of your work has pleased me more than I can say. Frankly, I did n't expect it so soon. It's all very well to say that Caroline Woodbridge has sent these people to you, but if you were n't making good, they would n't come."

"I'm sure I'm glad that you're glad," said Jerry. "I've certainly had good luck."

"It's more than luck," said the colonel, warmly. "I'm proud of you."

"You can go as far as you like," said Jerry, cheerfully. "I've got quite a back account to settle before I'm in danger of getting much of an idea of myself. But there is one thing this town ought to have," he added, "and that is a proper hospital. If I make good I'm going to try to see to it that it gets one."

"You're right about that," said the colonel. "We'll have to take hold of it one of these days."

"If we could touch some one for about a million."

"We'll get it," the colonel assented.

There was silence, and he flicked the ashes of his cigar in the direction of the fireplace.

"By the way," he said casually, "that little office nurse of yours seems an intelligent, capable sort of girl."

"She is," said Jerry. "I don't know how I'd

get along without her. She looks after these poor people that come in with little surgical cases as if she were father, mother, nurse, and house surgeon all in one. She's a wonder. And besides all that, she's looking after Budd on the side. That's confidential," he added. "I told you that he'd been in to consult me, but Mrs. Woodbridge did n't want it known that he was under regular treatment."

"I see," said the colonel, congratulating himself that the subject had opened so naturally. "Is it anything serious?"

"Nerves," Jerry answered. "He'll come through all right. But I wanted some one on the job to keep tabs on him. The fact is that Miss Xelva is supposed to be at the Woodbridges' in the capacity of secretary to Mrs. Woodbridge. She does n't want it known that Budd is a patient."

"I see," said the colonel again. "You were lucky to find a trained nurse that you could send to the Woodbridges in that way. Where did you get hold of her?"

"Just turned up. Dropped from heaven."

The colonel looked somewhat gravely at his son.

"Of course that's a figure of speech," he said. "Her references must have told you something about her."

"I never asked for her references. She's a lady, and that's enough."

"But you must know *something* about her. You could n't very well put her in Mrs. Woodbridge's house without knowing who she was."

Jerry met his father's eye.

"What has happened?" he demanded quietly.

"Nothing has happened."

"Yes, there has," said Jerry, firmly. "Some one has been talking. Is it Marion?"

"Marion has never mentioned Miss Xelva to me except when she first came. I recall her saying that you had engaged a very nice-looking young woman as nurse and office attendant."

"Has Mrs. Woodbridge said anything?"

The colonel shook his head.

"She's never spoken of her to me."

"Well, somebody has been talking to you," insisted Jerry, "and I won't have it. That girl is more nearly a saint than anybody I've ever known, and I'm not going to have anybody making insinuations."

"Still, you must be reasonable," said the colonel. "You come back from abroad, and just as you start practice, a very attractive young woman, apparently a foreigner, appears in Elmford without apparent reason, and you take her into your office

and assign her to a peculiarly confidential case in Mrs. Woodbridge's house. Just let me finish. If you say it's all right, that ends the matter as far as I am concerned; but you must see, my boy, that a young doctor just starting to practise in a place like Elmford has to be exceedingly careful. It is n't fair to Miss Xelva, and it is n't fair to Caroline Woodbridge."

Jerry was on his feet, his eyes flashing wrathfully.

"Of all the outrageous, infamous, filthy, rotten suspicions," he burst out, "this is the worst! You might just as well talk this way about Marion, and I don't know but what you might have a great deal more reason. She's always doing outrageous things, but this girl—why, Father, if you knew Virginia as I have come to know her and depend on her during the last three weeks, you'd be ashamed of the very thought. I never saw any one as fine and with as much character and sheer goodness. Just one look face to face with her is enough to satisfy anybody. Mrs. Woodbridge is crazy about her, calls her by her first name, and treats her like a member of the family."

"I don't doubt that all you say is true," said the colonel. "Only the fact remains that you don't know anything about her, and the circumstance

that Mrs. Woodbridge has taken to her puts all the more responsibility on to you. It ought to be perfectly simple to find out something about her if she is half what you say she is, and all I am asking is that you take the simple precautions which common sense and convention demand."

Jerry controlled himself with difficulty and was silent for a time. Then he said:

"I'll see Mrs. Woodbridge, but I wish you would tell me who's been talking to you. Is it any one in this house?"

"It was no one in this house," the colonel answered. "More than that I can't say. But don't think that I don't quite agree with you about Miss Xelva. But in fairness to her you ought to get her references and find out why she is doing something which from what I have gathered seems somewhat different from what she has been accustomed to. Can't you see that this is the reasonable course?"

"It may be," Jerry answered. "But it makes me sore all the way through. However, I'll have a talk with Mrs. Woodbridge to-morrow."

"That's all I ask," said the colonel.

The next afternoon a little after five Jerry started on foot for the Woodbridges'. He was still angry and indignant, though he now had himself in hand

and could see the force of his father's contention. What fortified his indignation and made it righteous in his own eyes, at least, was his attitude toward the girl. If he had ever thought of her except as he might think of his sister or as a father might think of his daughter, he would not have been so sure of himself. But Jerry knew the world too well to be taken in. If Virginia was not what she appeared to be, he knew that he would have found it out. Mr. Emerson exclaims, "How can a man be concealed?" Jerry knew that it would be even more impossible for a woman working daily in his office. She had always faced him with the same frank, trustful eyes that had appealed to him the day that she asked him for a position. He always thought of her as a child rather than as a woman; yet as the days passed, her judgment, capability, and quickness of perception made him rely upon her as he would have relied upon a man.

Just how much he had come to rely upon her he first realized during the conversation with his father, when the possibility of doing without her had passed through his mind. As a matter of fact, she had not only helped him at every turn, but he could see now that it was her fine enthusiasm for helping suffering that first made him see the possibilities of his profession and led him to take

himself seriously. The results of a few short weeks of this new attitude toward his work had been so fruitful that he felt himself under deep obligations to her already. All this intensified his resentment at the village gossip that was evidently beginning to spread about her. At the same time a day's reflection had made him realize that the situation was one that demanded treatment with a light hand.

The girl obviously had been brought up in an atmosphere of good breeding and at least a degree of luxury. It was also evident that something had happened to throw her out upon the world, dependent upon her own efforts for a living; but until she chose to speak of these things, they were her own affair. He was resolved not to subject her to the humiliation of answering leading questions. He was also resolved to protect her from the Elmford gossips. The only way that he saw of accomplishing this was to talk frankly with Mrs. Woodbridge.

As he reached the latter's house, he noticed a half-familiar runabout standing by the curb. He turned in and went up the walk toward the front door. Just as he reached the veranda, the door opened, and, Preston De Witt came out. If it had

been the kaiser, Jerry's surprise could not have been greater.

"Hello, Preston," he said.

"Hello," Preston answered and passed on.

Jerry rang the bell and stood gazing at the young man. Here was a new angle in the situation.

Hartley, the butler, opened the door.

"Is Mrs. Woodbridge in?" asked Jerry.

"No, sir," said Hartley. "She's out in the motor. Any message you wish to leave, sir?"

Jerry hesitated a moment.

"No," he said. "Is Mr. Budd in?"

"Yes, sir. Do you wish to see him?"

"No," said Jerry, "not now." He turned and went down the steps.

The next morning Jerry left word with Virginia that when Budd came for his treatment he wished to see him. If Budd and Preston had been having a set-to, he wanted to know about it. Just before noon the boy came into his office. Jerry scrutinized him for evidence of a nervous set-back. Budd's color was good. His general appearance more normal and cheerful than any day yet.

"Weight still going up?" Jerry asked.

Budd grinned and nodded.

"The fat man's class for me," he answered.

"Any more letters?"

Budd grew serious and shook his head.

"I guess you 've fixed that," he said.

"Don't worry about it," said Jerry, reassuringly. "You 'll come out all right. What I wanted to ask you about was this. If it's not indelicate, what were you doing with Preston yesterday?"

"Preston?" Budd repeated.

"Apparently he favored you with an afternoon call," said Jerry. "I thought he might have dropped in to leave you a box of rat poison or an invitation to a duel."

A look of comprehension came into the boy's face, and he smiled shrewdly.

"No," he answered. "Nothing doing with me. I heard he called, though."

"Friend of your mother's?"

Budd shook his head.

"No; he was calling on Virginia."

"On Virginia?" A sudden blankness came over Jerry's face. "Oh, I see," he said, although he did n't see at all. He changed the subject and began to ask Budd what he thought of the chances of the Giants in the World Series. When the boy had gone, he rose and paced the length of the room and back.

Why in the name of heaven was Preston De Witt calling on Virginia? Where had he met her? Had some of this talk that his father had picked up come to Preston? Did he think he could play with her?

Jerry felt the blood throbbing in his temples. His hands clenched. At that moment if Preston De Witt had entered the office convicted of the unamiable intentions that Jerry attributed to him, in all likelihood he would have departed in an ambulance.

As Jerry realized the absurdity of these mental dramatics, his tension relaxed, and he laughed. It was unlikely that Preston had heard anything about Virginia. The probability was rather the reverse, since Preston enjoyed the reputation of being one of those young men who always fall in love with ladies who happen to be rich and socially conspicuous.

The chances were that Mrs. Woodbridge had taken Virginia to the country club, Preston had been presented to her and had supposed that she was visiting Mrs. Woodbridge. When he found out the true situation he would call no more, which would be just as well. Although Jerry had not contemplated Virginia marrying any one, now that the idea had been suggested to him, he did n't want

the man to be Preston. The best man in the world would hardly be good enough for her.

"I suppose I can understand a little how a father feels," he said to himself. "If I were Virginia's father, I'd certainly wring the neck of any little shrimp like De Witt who had tried to butt in."

Late that afternoon he found Mrs. Woodbridge at home. Before he had a chance to get started she began about Budd.

"It's wonderful what you've done for him," she said. "He's a different boy. He's more himself than he's been in a year. When I think how our dear old Doctor Kales and all the rest of them could n't help him, and then realize what you've done, I want to tell everybody."

"You'd better not hire any halls," said Jerry. "You've sent me enough patients already. I don't want to ruin my health."

"And you were so right about insisting upon the nurse," she went on. "I never can be grateful enough to you for sending Virginia to us."

"I want to speak to you about that," said Jerry. "Of course I'm glad she's been satisfactory. I knew she would be, but I want you to remember that I recommended her as a nurse. The secretary and companion business was—well—what you might call another order. You understand?"

"I understand that we did n't want people to know that Budd was ill," said Mrs. Woodbridge, "but I don't quite see what you're driving at. Virginia has been as satisfactory as a secretary as she has been as a nurse."

"What I mean is this," said Jerry, bluntly. "As a nurse I could speak for her. But when you introduce her socially you must do that on your own responsibility. I don't know anything about her family. I've never asked her about it, and she's never chosen to tell me."

"Do you suspect that socially she's not quite—" She paused, and an amused look flashed in her eyes.

"I do not," said Jerry, hotly. "I think that socially and every other way she's O. K., but I'm just telling you that I don't know anything about her people. You women are so fussy about such things that I want to have a clear understanding. That's all—what lawyers call getting it on the record."

Mrs. Woodbridge gazed at him gravely, but her eyes danced.

"I think you've behaved with great caution, Gerald. However, as Budd would say, I'm ready to take a chance on Virginia. I can't tell you about it yet, and you must n't mention my

referring to it, but the fact is I think we're going to have a little surprise for you."

"That concerns Miss Xelva?"

Mrs. Woodbridge nodded.

"You're not going to tell me she's going to marry Budd?" Jerry blurted out.

"I'm afraid not that," she answered, laughing.

"I wish it were that."

Jerry looked at her sharply.

"It doesn't concern that fellow De Witt?" he demanded.

It was Mrs. Woodbridge who showed surprise now.

"Whatever put that in your head?" she asked evasively.

"Well, he's been coming here to see her, and I don't think he's the kind of young man that ought to be encouraged."

Mrs. Woodbridge laughed uproariously.

"What's the matter with you, Gerald? You come and warn me against the child, and now you act as if you were her father, mother, and maiden aunt."

"Simply this," said Jerry: "she's my office assistant, and in a way I'm responsible for her. I don't think De Witt is the kind of man that I want to see her playing around with."

"You 've certainly made that quite plain," said Mrs. Woodbridge. "Now I 'll give you a piece of advice. Virginia is capable of managing her own affairs, and if she were n't, I 'm here and ready to help her. As for Preston De Witt," she added, "I think he 's a very intelligent young man, and if he comes here to see Virginia, he comes with my entire approval." She smiled on Jerry in a motherly fashion, but there was a mischievous light in her eyes that made Jerry wonder.

"There 's something fishy about all this," he said. "What is it?"

"You 'll know nothing more than I 've told you," she answered. And there the conversation ended as far as Virginia was concerned.

As Jerry was going, she stopped him with a question.

"Budd's birthday is next Tuesday. Don't you think I could have a little party for him?"

"Offhand, I should say no," Jerry answered. "But I 'll think about it. I 'll let you know." He took his hat and departed.

CHAPTER XII

ON the way home Jerry did some thinking and arrived at several conclusions. In the first place, Mrs. Woodbridge must in some way have satisfied herself as to Virginia's status. In all probability the girl had told her where she came from and had talked with her about her family and past life. In the second place, whether Preston De Witt or any other young man was interested in her was none of his business. She was his office attendant and nothing else. He had rather played the fool in allowing himself to become worked up about it. In sober after thought he was perplexed that he should have done so. Possibly he was tired, and his point of view a little out of focus.

The possibility of Preston's having become interested in Virginia raised several entertaining possibilities regarding Grace. If Preston was really giving Virginia "a rush," it meant that Grace was holding him at arm's-length, and that was the important aspect of the matter as it concerned Budd. It occurred to him that this might be the

time to send Budd out to reconnoiter the enemy's defenses and see how things stood, also to test the boy's progress in the noble art of taking care of himself. The difficulty, however, was in arranging the meeting so that in case Budd fared badly he could intervene before any serious mischief was done.

Suddenly an idea came to him, inspired by Mrs. Woodbridge's request for a birthday party. Budd should have his party. It would be arranged as a surprise. Grace would be there, and there would be certain other surprise features stage-managed by himself, and he would be on hand himself to observe the course of events and ready in case of need to bring first aid to the injured. As the plan took shape he chuckled. The politics of juvenile love amused him.

That evening he took Marion into his confidence as far as was needful to insure the presence of Grace. He told her merely that Budd had been ill and under treatment for nearly a month, and now he was planning to celebrate his recovery by a little surprise party on the evening of his birthday. Marion approved of the idea and began to make out a list of people. The third name that she wrote down was Grace's.

"Yes, we must have her," Jerry observed casu-

ally, "and we must make sure that everybody turns up. A surprise party where half the people back out at the last minute is rather ghastly."

"You can leave that to me," said Marion. "I'll produce everybody that I ask."

"And especially Grace," he put in. "I want to get a little fun out of this party myself."

Marion eyed him with motherly indulgence.

"You don't seem to have been cutting much ice lately in that direction."

"Been too busy," Jerry answered. "But that reminds me, there's no need of having Preston. Let me have a free field for once."

"All right," she answered; "we'll suppress Preston. I don't think he and Budd have ever been very intimate."

"Good," said Jerry. "You see about the music, and I'll arrange with Mrs. Woodbridge about supper."

After some thought on the matter Jerry called Virginia into consultation. He explained the proposed party and asked her what she thought the effect of Grace's presence would be on Budd. Virginia weighed the question.

"You know how her letters have upset him," she said. "Don't you think that seeing her like that in his own house will set him back?"

Jerry grinned.

"I think it's going to set him back for life. That's what I'm counting on, anyway. If he can't be happy without her, the next best thing is to see if he can be happy with her."

The girl looked surprised.

"But I thought she was in love with Mr. De Witt."

Jerry glanced at her sharply. Was she putting something over on him? Was that innocent, honest gaze only a mask, after all? On this subject Jerry was inclined to hold all ladies suspect.

"I don't believe it," he said. "I think they have both been playing. In fact I think Preston is busy on another job." He watched for some telltale deepening of her color, but nothing happened. If she had anything to conceal, she did it masterfully.

"But you surely don't believe that Miss Tyler cares for Mr. Woodbridge?" she said with a note of incredulity.

"I don't believe she thinks she does now," he answered, "but I believe she used to, and if she did once, she can be made to again."

"Made to?" Virginia repeated.

"Yes, made to."

Virginia's lip curled.

"If she's that kind of girl, I think he's better off without her."

"She's not *that kind* of girl.' She's an awfully nice girl. Oh, yes, she is."

"Then how could she have treated him so?" Virginia demanded.

"Don't blame her," said Jerry. "It was n't her fault."

"It certainly was n't his," she retorted.

"Yes; the fault was Budd's."

"Oh, you can't mean that!" she cried. "His devotion to that girl is perfectly beautiful."

"Yes, and see where it's landed him! So you've got these highfalutin notions, too?"

She made no denial, and he went on:

"My dear child, that kind of thing is very romantic and beautiful in books, but it's pretty dangerous stuff to tie up to. Some day you'll be unlucky enough to fall in love yourself."

Virginia smiled.

"You don't think that's possible, I suppose."

"It might be."

"Then you ought to know the truth about it."

"I'd like to," she answered.

"Then I'll tell you. The truth is that it's all a *game*."

She uttered a protest.

"Yes; that's what it is—a mean, selfish, rotten game."

She burst out laughing.

"You're making fun of me. It's ridiculous to talk that way!"

"It's the fact," he answered. "And as soon as you fall in love, the game begins, and you've got to play it whether you want to or not. Most people play it like Budd, without knowing the rules, and get the worst of it. Now why not be sensible and play it with your eyes open?"

"I don't think I'd care to *play* it at all," she answered gravely.

"Stuff!" he cried. "If you were in love, wouldn't you like to know how to win? Would n't you want to bring your victim to your feet—make him adore you, believe you the most charming and beautiful and wonderful woman in the world, make him hope for nothing, think of nothing, dream of nothing, but you?"

"Do you think you can do that by a set of rules?" she asked.

"Sure," he answered. "I'll guarantee it."

"And the rules?"

"The rules are to avoid all the blunders Budd has made."

"I can't see that Budd has made any blunders," she answered defiantly.

He looked at her hopelessly.

"He's done nothing else. In the first place, he showed her that he loved her, honorably, devotedly, exclusively. Note *exclusively*! That alone was enough to queer him."

"You mean he should n't have told her?"

"No; he should have told her whenever he got the chance. His trouble was that he probably did n't tell her at all, but let her find it out from the way he acted. What he should have done was to tell her early and often, but act so that she was never quite sure that he meant it."

Virginia gave him a shocked look from her mild eyes, but Jerry kept on.

"In the second place, he was too good to her. He paid her too much attention, was always hanging about till his visits became about as exciting as the milkman's. One of the principal rules of the game is judicious absence. Instead, he was always hanging around. She took it as a matter of course and naturally enough began to take notice elsewhere to bring a little sunshine into life. Then along came jealousy. You can't keep jealousy out of this love stuff, but it's rare that both parties have it, and if you know how, you can manage it

so that you 're not the victim. The most important of all the rules is to keep the other fellow jealous and avoid it yourself. If you don't, you end up like Budd—jealousy, desperation, despair, doctor."

"Well, I can't say that I think it's a very nice game," said Virginia.

"I told you that," Jerry answered. "But it's justified by the circumstances, because if you fall in love with a man and let him see your devotion is so great you can't think of anything else, he'll begin to care less and less about you. It's curious, but it's so."

A curious shadow, half of pain, half of wonder, crossed Virginia's face.

"It's hard to believe that," she said slowly. "I would n't want to believe it."

"What you want has n't anything to do with it," said Jerry, grimly. "It's what always happens, and if I should ever fall in love, you can bet I'm going to play the game."

"You?" said the girl.

"To the limit," he answered. "It's one's duty as a sane human being. Why, there are thousands of poor creatures all over the world whose lives have been ruined just because they loved too much and did n't know it was all a game. And

that's Budd's danger. He's a goner unless we can save him. And that's what I wanted to speak to you about. As usual, I'm depending on you to help me. Will you?"

"Of course," she answered; "but what do you want me to do?"

"I want *you* to play the game. I want you to *pretend* to be in love."

"You want Miss Tyler to think that I'm in love with Mr. Woodbridge?"

"Exactly. It's the trump-card we'll have to play if things don't go well. I want Grace Tyler to think that you and Budd are crazy about each other."

Virginia laughed.

"One might be justified in doing a good deal to help the unfortunate, but you could never get Mr. Woodbridge to do his part."

"I'm not going to try. All I want is to have Miss Tyler see you and Budd together, laughing and jolly, on pleasant, friendly terms, and then to have you make her feel that you're exercising proprietary rights. Do you think you can?"

Virginia laughed again.

"I might make her feel that I was exercising proprietary rights," she answered, "but do you

think you could make Mr. Woodbridge laugh and be jolly if she was around?"

"I'll attend to that. All I'm counting on you for is the female ownership part. You're really too good for that kind of thing, but it must be in the blood, because, after all, you're a woman. And of course you must n't appear in a nurse's uniform," he added. "I'll fix that with Mrs. Woodbridge. I want you to doll up. I want you to be as pretty as you can."

The girl colored and smiled.

"I'll do my best," she said, "but you must n't expect very much."

Jerry looked at her keenly.

"I don't know about that," he said. "It looks to me as though you ought to do pretty well and not have to break your neck trying."

Virginia dropped her eyes while the flush deepened.

"So that's all arranged," he went on. "Tuesday night we'll have a show-down and see what we can do. The success of our anti-jealousy serum depends on it. And remember," he added in a gentler tone, "if we pull it off, the credit will all be yours. When I think of it, the credit for everything this office has done in the past month

belongs to you. When you do fall in love and marry and leave me, I want you to be very happy."

"I shall always stay here as long as you 'll let me," she answered.

"No, you won't," he answered with a touch of bitterness. "You 'll go, but if he is n't worthy of you, he 'll have to settle with me. You 've put me under very deep obligations, Virginia, and I want you to know that I know it." It was the first time that he had ever spoken to her by her first name. He held out his hand. She let hers rest in it for a moment and then, without meeting his eyes, turned and left the room.

"No Preston De Witt for that girl," he muttered. "There 's got to be a real man on the job or I 'll have something to say about it."

PART IV

CHAPTER XIII

AT nine-thirty Tuesday evening Budd's birthday appeared from every point of view to have been a success. After his usual daily régime there had been a birthday dinner with a lighted cake out of which Virginia had drawn the thimble, his mother the ring, and Budd the money. The appropriateness of Fate in making these allotments was sustained in Budd's case by the pleasant check that a doting mother had bestowed upon him earlier in the day. A month of careful living and rigorous exercise had put him in the pink of condition physically, and he seemed to be winning in his efforts to banish Grace from his thoughts. Altogether it was all very jolly and delightful at the Woodbridges' that evening, and as is unusual with surprise parties, Budd was entirely unsuspecting of the entertainment that was about to burst upon him.

After dinner the little family gathered in the library for its usual evening program, Mrs. Woodbridge embroidering, Budd and Virginia playing piquet. The cards seemed to be running amaz-

ingly for Budd. As they played the last hand, Virginia laughed in mock desperation and began to add up the score.

"This is the seventh time in succession that you've beaten me, and I know I play the better game."

The boy looked at her quizzically.

"You know, lucky at cards—"

She raised a finger warningly.

"Now! now!"

"Oh, I'm all right," he answered in an undertone. "I was thinking how lucky you must be at —"

She colored slightly.

"You'd better think about something else," she said lightly.

Mrs. Woodbridge raised her eyebrows, but went on with her needlework, giving no other sign that she had overheard.

Budd smiled, yawned, and rose from his chair.

"I must have my go at the old punching-bag," he observed. "I can't believe this is my last night of training. I think I'm going to miss it. Mother," he went on, "how would you propose that your little son should break training—wine, woman, or song?"

Mrs. Woodbridge looked at him proudly.

"I hope not by smoking cigarettes again," she answered. "You're so splendidly well that I want you to keep so."

Budd shook his head doubtfully.

"It's bad for a man to have as much health as I have. It's like not spending your money. I've got to do something wicked."

The grandfather's clock that struck the quarters began to chime, indicating that it was a quarter past nine. Mrs. Woodbridge and Virginia exchanged glances.

"Mr. Budd," said the latter, "it's time for you to punch the bag. You're still under my orders."

Budd acknowledged her authority with an exaggerated bow and lounged out of the room. As they heard him whistling on his way up-stairs the two women rose.

"You'd better get dressed, Virgie," said Mrs. Woodbridge. "I'll get Hartley and the gardener to get the rug up in the drawing-room and move the furniture." She went to the electric button and pressed it.

A moment later the butler appeared and followed Mrs. Woodbridge toward the drawing-room. As Virginia passed out into the hall on her way up-stairs, she caught sight of an envelop standing on edge against the wall under the hall table where

letters were usually placed. She rescued it and saw that it was addressed to Budd and unopened. It had evidently slipped down behind the table, blown by a draft of air or crowded off by the newspapers. The note had obviously been delivered by hand, as it bore no stamp. How long it had lain on the floor was a question. She hesitated a moment, then turned into the drawing-room.

"Hartley," she said, "I've just found this note for Mr. Budd on the floor under the table. Have you any idea when it was delivered?"

The man looked at it in some concern.

"Why, that came this morning, Miss Xelva," he answered, "while he was out for his walk. I laid it on the table for him. I'm very sorry."

"It's nobody's fault," she answered. "I'll take it up to him in the gymnasium. She went up to the third story. As she entered, the bag-puncher suspended his exertions."

"Do you want to see a little exhibition?" he asked, panting.

"Of course," she answered gaily; "but here's a note that came for you this morning and slipped down behind the table. I thought it might be something important."

"Thanks," he said and came over and took it.

As he glanced at the handwriting, a change came over his face.

"It's from—" she began.

He nodded.

"Perhaps I ought n't to have given it to you," she said doubtfully.

"What nonsense!" he exclaimed and tore it open. Slowly he produced a card with a verse printed on it, signed in ink with the initials G. T.

"A birthday card?" said Virginia.

Budd nodded and began to read:

"May joy and love
In your life ne'er cease,
But grow and grow
As your years increase."

"Joy and love," he repeated, and stood staring at the bit of cardboard like a creature spellbound. Virginia stretched out her hand.

"You'd better let me take that," she said gently.

He made no opposition, and she took the card.

"Now let's talk of something else," she went on. "Suppose we have the exhibition with the bag."

He seemed not to hear her.

"If I only could be sorry that she's sent it," he

murmured as if thinking aloud. "But I'm not."

"It's only a printed birthday card," she said.
"It does n't amount to anything."

He sighed wearily.

"That's right. Still, it was awfully sweet of her when you think how I've treated her. I ought to acknowledge it, had n't I?"

"The doctor will tell you about that," said Virginia, "just as he always does."

"That's what I'm afraid of."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't you know the replies he made me send to the two letters she wrote me?"

"No; you never showed them to me."

Budd went to his coat, which was hanging on the back of a chair, and drew two worn envelopes from the breast pocket.

"Here," he said.

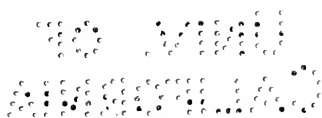
As Virginia read them, he gave a summary of the answers that Jerry had dictated.

"It was pretty hard," she said sympathetically, "but I'm sure the doctor was right."

"I don't see why. I don't see what good it did to write that kind of stuff to her. Every time I hear from her it brings it all back again." He put the birthday card with the letters, replaced them in his pocket, and slipped on the coat.



"Joy and love," he repeated



Virginia watched him with a look of anxiety.

"You must try not to think about it," she said.

"Not think about it?" he repeated. He gazed at her bitterly. "I guess you don't know what love is," he said.

"Oh, yes, I do," she answered steadily. "Perhaps better than you do."

He gave her a quick, wondering look.

"Well, if you do," he said, "I'm sorry for you. But I'm through. This serum and exercise business can't cure it. You think you're getting better, and then something happens like this birthday card, and it's all off again. There's only one thing to do."

"What is it?"

"Clear out, run away from it, and I'm going to do it. The month that I promised to take Dr. Sumner's treatment is up to-morrow. The day after I'm off."

"But if you really love," she said simply, "could you go away from the person you care for?"

"Is there anything else you can do when there's no hope of getting her?"

"There are lots of things we want, but can't have. That's no reason why we should run away from them. And real love most of all."

"Would you feel that way if you were in love

with a man who was n't in love with you?" he demanded.

"I think so," she answered steadily. "In fact I know I should."

"I can't see it," said the boy.

"Why, just to be near the person you care for, to hear his voice, to know he's near, in the same town with me, would give me a feeling of peace and happiness—something you can't describe, like birds singing inside your heart. Can't you understand that?"

He shook his head.

"You're beyond me. I can't feel as if any birds were singing inside me. It's a different kind of feeling that I've got. Have you ever heard of people dying of thirst—how they beg for water and go mad thinking about it, how they imagine they see it just beyond their reach and stretch out their arms towards it and then find it is n't there? Well, that's the way it takes me."

"But it *is* there," she answered. "Love is a real thing. It's in all."

"Stop!" he said impatiently. "Suppose you were dying of thirst. What would you think if some one came to you with real water—fresh, pure water—and said, 'Now you must n't drink this, but just to have it near you ought to satisfy you,

ought to give you a feeling like birds singing.' ”

“You should n't be thirsty,” she answered. “Love is n't wanting. It's giving; it's feeling; it's being ready to give everything, not demanding everything.”

He shook his head sadly.

“That's all beyond me. All I know is that I'm thirsty, and the water is out of reach.”

She let her hand rest gently on his shoulder.

“Perhaps it is n't out of reach,” she suggested.

“Don't pull the hope stuff on me,” he began. “I know when I'm beaten. I'm off on Thursday.”

She was framing an answer, when the door opened, and Jerry came in. He took one look at Budd, then glanced at Virginia.

“What's this,” he demanded, “a funeral or a bag-punching contest? What's happened?”

“Mr. Woodbridge and I have been having a little talk,” Virginia began.

“I just got this,” said Budd. He fished the packet of letters from his pocket and handed the birthday card to Jerry.

“Pretty, is n't it?” said Jerry, with his eyes on the worn letters. “Those come with it?”

“No,” said Budd. “Those are the letters that came before. You've seen them.”

"Better give 'em to me," Jerry said quietly. "I was a fool to let you keep them." He took the letters and the card, tore them across, and looked around the room as if for a fireplace. Finding none, he stuffed the pieces into his pocket. Then he gazed searchingly at Budd. The boy dropped his eyes.

"What shall I do about the card?" he asked in a hollow voice.

"Nothing just now," said Jerry. "Get into your evening clothes. Quick!"

"Evening clothes?" repeated Budd.

"Yes. You and I are going to have a little time to-night. How long will it take you to dress?"

"Ten minutes."

"Make it nine and a half. I want to speak to Miss Xelva."

"Are we going out?" Budd asked as he reached the door.

"I'll explain about that later," Jerry answered. "Hustle!"

Budd disappeared, and Jerry turned to Virginia.

"Has he been that way long?"

"Since he got the birthday card a few minutes ago. It seemed to bring on a relapse."

"It's too bad! I wanted to have him in good

shape to-night," Jerry said regretfully. "What are we going to do about it?"

"Perhaps I ought n't to have given it to him," said Virginia. "But of course I did n't know what it was till he opened it. I'm sorry."

"It was n't your fault," he answered. He looked at his watch. "The milk is spilled, and there's no time to cry about it. I'll go down and sit with him while he's dressing. Perhaps I can throw a little joy into him. But you'd better get dressed yourself. Marion and some of the people are down-stairs. You remember what you promised to do?"

Virginia nodded.

"You'll have to do it big, because in the state he's in now we'll have to carry him. I mean you'll have to carry him. Whenever I get in a tight place, you always seem to be made the goat."

"You know I am always glad to help," she said.

"Well, just throw yourself into high speed to-night," he went on. "You must be something of an actress because you're a woman. Play the part to the limit. We've got to get that girl going. Put everything on but the kitchen stove. Make the rest of the bunch look like last year's birds' nests.

Forget this nurse business. To-night you're the queen of the fairies!"

Her eyes danced, and her color heightened as he looked at her.

"By Jove, I believe you can do it!" he cried impulsively.

She gave him a glance that he would have described as the "side eye," laughed, and ran out of the room. He heard her soft, quick footfall on the stairs and followed more deliberately.

CHAPTER XIV

AT the door of Budd's bedroom Jerry stopped for further thought on the situation. He felt that it was a time for heroic measures. A housemaid passed through the hall. He beckoned to her and gave her a whispered message.

"I'll tell Mr. Hartley at once," she answered and went on. As he was about to knock at Budd's door he heard his name called in a conspirator's whisper and, turning, saw Marion. She was out of breath from running up-stairs.

"Grace has backed out," she said in an undertone. "I stopped for her, and she would n't come."

"What's the matter?" Jerry asked.

"She said she had a headache, but I don't think that's it. Have you and she been fighting?"

"Not enough to speak of," Jerry answered absently. He was thinking what was best to be done. Of course if Grace did n't come, there was no danger of Budd relapsing. On the other hand, if Grace was piqued because Budd had taken no notice of her birthday card, it was just the moment to

bring off his coup. There had to be a show-down some time, and despite the risk he decided on having it at once.

"I'll call her up," he said to Marion. "I think there's a telephone in the pantry that I can use. You know the house better than I do. Lead me down the back stairs."

A few moments later he was talking with Grace.

"Why this throw-down?" he demanded. "I'm crushed."

"Why, I was n't feeling very well," came the answer. "Mother thought I ought to go to bed."

"Describe your symptoms, and I'll prescribe for you," said Jerry.

The girl laughed.

"You can't put this over on me," he went on. "My physician's trained ear tells me you're perfectly well. It's just low-down meanness. Here I am in this scene of gaiety without a soul who really understands me. If you don't come, I'll probably do something desperate."

"Really, I can't come," she said, but with less determination than before.

"Please," he went on plaintively. "I'm not exaggerating my troubles. Budd has cut me out with the only other girl that looks promising, and I'm in the down-and-out class." He turned his

face away from the instrument and chuckled at the change in Grace's voice.

"Who is it?" she asked.

"I don't think you know her," he answered. "She's a stranger. But that's neither here nor there. I'm counting on you. You promised to teach me to trot, and this is my chance."

"Oh I can't," she said uncertainly. "I'm not dressed."

"That's not so," he answered, taking a blind chance. "You're all dressed and ready, and you won't come just because you want to blight my evening."

"You ought to go into mind-reading," she said, laughing.

"Now look here," he said. "I'll have a car at the house for you in two minutes, and you come right over."

"All right," was the answer.

"Now you're talking like a sensible woman," he said. "And, remember, I get the first waltz."

She answered, "Yes," and hung up.

Slipping out a side door, Jerry gave directions to the family chauffeur and hurried back up-stairs to Budd's room. He knocked sharply, and at Budd's answering "Come in" he entered.

Instead of dressing, Budd was seated in a rock-

ing-chair, gazing dully at the fireplace. He rose as he saw Jerry and began slowly peeling off his sweater.

"I thought I told you to hustle," said Jerry, cheerfully. "You're going on like a man who does n't know he is alive."

"What's all this row about, anyway?" demanded Budd, unlacing one of his gymnasium shoes. "I thought you did n't want me to go out in the evening."

Before Jerry answered, there was a knock, and Hartley came in with a tray on which stood a decanter of brandy, two glasses, ice, and soda.

Budd's eyes opened.

"Put it on the table," said Jerry. "I'll pour it!"

The butler went out, and Jerry began to pour.

"I thought it would be a good plan to open our little celebration with a small drink," he explained casually.

"But won't that interfere with the treatment?" Budd began in amazement.

"It won't interfere with anything now," said Jerry, calmly. "We're through with your treatment."

"You mean I'm cured?"

"That's the idea exactly. You've done as I've

told you; the bugs have done their work. You could n't be jealous again if you tried, and all you've got to do now is to cheer up and believe it."

Budd grinned dolefully.

"It seems funny to have you spring this on me just after that birthday card had sort of upset me again."

"You're not upset," said Jerry. "That's just imagination. Get some of this inside you, and you'll take a more healthy view of life." He held out the glass, and Budd sipped a little with evident distaste.

"Here's luck!" said Jerry. "From this time on you can smoke and drink in moderation, go back to work, have all the fun you want, and see your friends."

"See anybody I want?"

"Sure."

The boy's eyes brightened.

"Then the first thing I'm going to do to-morrow is to see Grace Tyler and tell her the truth about these letters."

Jerry looked at him in dismay.

"In heaven's name what are you going to do that for!" he exclaimed.

"Because I don't want to lie to her," the boy an-

swered resolutely. "It's troubled me a lot."

"But I thought you had given up hope of Miss Tyler ever caring for you again."

"I have. That's all over. But her opinion of me matters just the same."

"Then you did n't mean what you said about wishing her joy and not wanting to stand in her way?"

"Yes, I did mean it, every word of it. Telling her the truth does n't interfere with that."

"Of course it interferes with it. You won't be acting as if you wished her joy if you tell her about these letters."

"And why not?" demanded Budd.

"Why not? Don't you know the reason that I made you answer them as I did?"

"I supposed you wanted me to offend her so she would n't write to me again."

"Offend her!" cried Jerry. "Don't you see that it was entirely for her sake? Don't you see that if you let her know you're going on suffering and hopeless, loving her always, she can't help being unhappy and miserable? How do you think a nice girl like Grace would feel about it? Can't you see that it's bound to make her feel that she's the cause of wrecking your life?"

"She does n't think about that!"

"Of course she does. She's still worrying about you. Her birthday card shows that. Now if you really mean what you say and want to make her happy, there's just one thing to do—the big generous thing, the noble thing, the heroic thing!"

"What is that?"

"Sacrifice your own feelings for her!"

"How?"

"Show her that she *has n't* wrecked your life; let her see that your jealousy is all gone, as it really is; let her believe that your mournfulness is gone, that your love is gone. That's the thing to do."

Budd looked at him doubtfully.

"Take it from me, that's the thing to do! Make her happy by showing her that *you* are happy."

"I think I see what you mean," said the boy, slowly.

"That's talking sense. I knew you would. Now I'll tell you something," Jerry went on. "The reason why I asked you to get dressed is that you're going to have a little party to-night—a birthday party. Some of your guests are downstairs now."

"Who?" demanded Budd.

"Well, for one, there's Grace Tyler."

"Grace?" the boy gasped. "Here?"

"Sure," said Jerry. "Why not?"

Budd made no answer. His eyes fell upon the long drink on the table. He moved toward it, seized it, and swallowed it.

"There's nothing to be frightened about," said Jerry. "Here's your chance to do the big thing we were talking about. Show her you're happy. Josh her, laugh, be merry!"

Budd shook his head, panic-stricken.

"I could n't. I don't know how."

"Of course you know how. Make a bluff—wear a smile—look as if you were having a good time even if it kills you. Are n't you willing to do that much for her?"

"I'll try," said the boy.

"That's better," said Jerry. "Now this is the plot. Slip a dressing-gown over your dinner-jacket, come down into the library, and be doing something when we come in. You see, you've got to be surprised. Do you get the idea?"

Budd nodded dumbly.

"What'll I be doing?"

Jerry's eyes fell upon a pile of magazines.

"Here," he said, picking up the top one. "Here's the 'Architectural Record.' You're thinking of building a house out on your mother's farm, and you're studying up plans. That's a good touch," he added. "Be so busy with them

that you don't see or hear anything till we're all in the room. You can have your back to the door. Understand?"

"I think so," said Budd. He took a cigarette from the case that Jerry handed him and lit it.

"Then we'll all yell," Jerry went on, "and you'll jump up and be surprised and shake hands with everybody—but not with Grace," he added. "Be cordial to her, but don't shake hands. You see, it'll be kinder to her not to. It will make her realize that you're trying to have things as she wants them, *just friends*."

"But don't friends shake hands?" asked Budd.

"Yes; but not under these conditions. She'll get what you mean, and in the crowd no one else will notice it. Just act as if you'd seen her every day and you did n't have to take special notice of her. That's the way to make her really feel comfortable and at home." He started for the door, but stopped before he reached it. "Now there's one thing more. Your mother has made a point of having Miss Xelva as one of the guests. She does n't know any of these other people; so make a point of being nice to her—very nice, won't you?"

"Why, of course," said Budd. "I get on with Virginia almost as if she were my sister. Of course I want her to have a good time."

"That's the idea," said Jerry. "Only for this evening you might try to forget you get on with her like a sister. Imagine you were giving her a sort of rush. We don't want people to realize that she's a trained nurse. Dance with her and take her out on the veranda. Give her a time."

"It might sort of help to make it easier for Grace," Budd suggested.

"That's the idea exactly," cried Jerry, with enthusiasm. "If she would only believe that you were having a good time with Virginia—just think of the load it would take off her mind. You don't realize how it crushes a nice girl to feel that she's ruined a man's life."

"Well, I'll try," said Budd, doggedly. The drink was beginning to quicken his circulation, and his gloom showed signs of lightening.

"Then everything's arranged," said Jerry. "Hurry into your clothes, and I'll go down and arrange the surprise."

He closed the door behind him and mopped his brow. The last half hour had been strenuous.

CHAPTER XV

THE great surprise scene conducted by Marion went off successfully. No one seemed to think it odd that Budd should sit immersed in the "Architectural Record" with thirty giggling, tit-ttering young people tiptoeing and rustling into the room within ten feet of him. And no one thought it odd that when he slipped off his dressing-gown he appeared in evening clothes. Life in moments of excitement accepts things that would stagger the probabilities of the stage. There was a great deal of noise, hand-shaking, and congratulations, and then the music suddenly struck up in the drawing-room, and the dancers made a rush for the floor.

Jerry had had a word with Grace as she came in, but then he became separated in the crowd. As the party streamed into the ball-room, he fell behind. As he reached the front hall it was empty. A footfall on the stair made him turn. He saw a slender girl descending. She was in an evening gown of light blue, and wore a string of pearls about her throat. Her slim, round arms were bare. The mass of corn-colored hair was twisted

in a Greek knot and held with a clasp of pearls. She seemed tall and carried herself like a grand duchess.

Jerry gasped. The second look told him it was Virginia, but Virginia so transformed that it needed the glance of the mild, childlike eyes to make him sure.

She smiled at his astonishment, which was so evidently admiring, and her color deepened.

"Dr. Sumner, I believe," she said, laughing.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed, "you've taken the wind out of me, Virginia. I would n't have known you."

"Am I all right?"

"And then some," he answered. "How did you do it?"

She looked at him, coloring.

"Do it?" she repeated.

"Why, my child," he exclaimed, "you're wonderful! You're glorious! Why have n't I ever realized it?"

"That's hardly for me to say," she answered, laughing. "I would n't have thought that a change of gowns could make a difference to a serious person like you."

"I guess it's a case of nobody home," he answered, tapping his head.

"Well, here I am as a vampire," she said. "How shall I go to work? You know I don't know any of these people."

"I'll have to be driving the whole man bunch off with a club in about two minutes," he answered. "We'd better get down to business before you go on exhibition." As he spoke he saw a young man stop Budd, who was waltzing with Gertrude Ludlow, and dance away with her. Budd came on around the room to the doorway into the hall, and Jerry seized him.

"Look here," he said, "here's a chance for you to get a turn with Virginia while I hunt up some young men to introduce to her. Bring her back here when the music stops."

Budd cast an admiring look at his former keeper.

"My, but you're some queen!" he exclaimed. "I never saw you dolled up like this."

Virginia laughed.

"I never liked to believe it, but I guess it's true that clothes make the woman," she said. "Come along and dance."

Jerry watched them start off. Virginia waltzed in what for present-day America was a somewhat old-fashioned manner, holding herself with a stately erectness and moving with a free, gliding motion.

"She certainly can dance," Jerry muttered under his breath. Then something strange began to happen to him. His breath began to come short and quick. Some invisible, intangible force clutched at his throat. His pulses throbbed. His eyes followed the girl, fascinated, unable to look away.

"By the Lord!" he gasped. He stood dazed and vibrating.

He was roused from this amazing state by Grace and George Cartwright, who had stopped dancing and were headed toward the library.

"Oh, here's where you're hiding!" cried the girl. "This is the way you keep your engagements!"

"I was just waiting for you," he answered quickly. "I was afraid to cut in. You don't understand how a timid man feels at a ball."

She laughed ironically, and they swept out upon the floor. Half-way around the room he felt her start and grow rigid.

"Who is that girl in blue?" she asked a moment later. "I don't think I ever saw her before."

"The one over there dancing with the Parker boy?" he answered.

"That's Carrie Frothingham," she said impatiently. "The one with the pearls and the light hair."

He pretended to look about the room.

"Oh," he said, "you mean the girl dancing with Budd? That 's—" But before he could finish, a "Hello, Grace!" sounded in his ears. A hand was laid on his arm, and Mr. Montgomery Chapman halted them. "Can't I have just a little bit of this?" he pleaded.

"I'd much rather not," said Grace, candidly; but the next moment she was swept away. "The next," she called back to Jerry, and he nodded.

He watched her till she was lost in the crowd. He saw that her eyes were following Virginia and Budd.

"It's beginning all right," he said to himself. Then his eyes, too, hunted out Virginia and her partner. He assured himself that Budd wore a real smile and seemed generally to be enjoying himself, and then Budd seemed to vanish, and all that Jerry saw was the slim, stately, radiant figure moving rythmically to the waltz music.

Five minutes later he found himself in the hall with Virginia again. The music had stopped, but almost immediately had started a lively rag-time to which the dancers were doing the fox-trot. Just as it began, Budd made a dive into the throng and emerged with Grace Tyler. It was the dance that had been promised to Jerry, but he decided that

his failure to turn up would not be charged against him. Anyway, he did not care.

"I don't do this thing," he said to Virginia. "Let's go around to the veranda."

"I don't do it very well myself," she answered and followed him. The veranda running around two sides of the house was furnished with easy-chairs and divans and dimly lighted by the French windows of the ball-room. One could watch the dancers from the shadow without being seen.

"Look!" said Jerry. "They're dancing together."

Virginia looked.

"Is that Miss Tyler? You know, I've never seen her."

"That's your rival," he answered. "But look at the boy, laughing, wearing a grin that would take in a pie. There's nothing love-sick about that! Gad, he's a wonder! If he can keep that up, it's a cinch! I only hope the brandy and soda does n't die in him."

"You don't mean to say you gave him brandy and soda?"

"I sure did," he answered.

"I suppose it is all right since you believe it's all a game," she observed thoughtfully. "Did you tell him to dance with her, too?"

Suddenly the thing that had happened to Jerry in the hall came upon him again. His head began to swim. His breath behaved oddly. He stood gazing at the girl beside him, unable to speak, unaware of what was going on about him.

"What was that?" he said thickly. "What did you say?"

She glanced at him a little perplexed.

"I asked you if you made him dance with her?"

With an effort Jerry pulled himself together, and the thing seemed to pass off, though his knees felt weak.

"I did n't have to," he answered.

"She 's trying to talk to him," observed Virginia.

"That 's right," said Jerry. "She 'll be steering him for a dark corner next. You see! We 've got that young lady going, and when we play our trump-card—" He broke off as Virginia touched his arm.

"Look!" she exclaimed. "They 've stopped. She 's limping. She 's sprained her ankle. The poor child!"

"It 's a bluff," said Jerry, unfeelingly. "What did I tell you? She 's steering him for the veranda. What do you think of the love game now?" he demanded. There was an earnestness in his own tone that startled him. It was as if he was on

the defensive himself, as if his reason was fighting against that strange, unreasonable emotion that twice in the last half hour had swept him.

"We 'd better get out of here," she answered, "or we 'll be caught."

He acquiesced, and led the way around the veranda toward the front door.

Leaning heavily on Budd's arm, Grace stepped out into the dark and groped her way to the divan from which Jerry and Virginia had been watching the ball-room.

"I 'm afraid it hurts frightfully," said the boy.

"No; it is n't really anything," she answered bravely. "It 'll be gone in a minute. I wrenched it the other day, and the least little thing brings it back. When those people bumped into us it just snapped over."

"There is n't anything so painful," said Budd, anxiously. He helped her arrange herself on the cushions. "Had n't I better get Dr. Sumner?"

"Oh, no, please don't!" she cried in alarm.

"But it may be serious."

"No," she insisted heroically. "Just let me sit here and you go and dance. I 'm not going to spoil your evening."

"But I don't want to," he protested. "You don't mind if I stay, do you?"

"Of course I don't mind," she answered, "only I'd feel happier if I thought you were enjoying yourself. I don't think it's badly swollen." She lifted her foot and began to rub her silk-clad ankle. "Can you feel the swelling?" she asked presently.

Budd timorously put forth two fingers and touched it.

"Perhaps I'd better turn up the lights," he suggested. "I could see better."

"Oh, no!" she said. "It's pleasanter as it is, don't you think so?"

"Yes; I think so," he answered. "But your ankle—"

"Well, the light can't help my ankle, can it?" She laughed her rippling, silvery laugh. "As long as I'm in this position, it's really stopped hurting. Anyway, I believe in Christian Science about things like this. If you don't think about them, you don't feel 'em. Don't you think so?"

"I suppose that's so," said Budd, doubtfully. "But I think you've been awfully brave about it."

"Nonsense!" she answered. "I'm the biggest coward that ever lived. But let's forget the ankle. What were we talking about?"

"Before you hurt your ankle?"

"Yes, when we were dancing. I remember now.

You were going to tell me what had been keeping you so fearfully busy this last month."

Budd said nothing. A sudden realization burst on him of what Dr. Sumner would think.

"I'm waiting," said Grace, sweetly. "Whatever it was, it certainly agreed with you. I don't think I've ever seen you looking so well."

"That's what I always think about you," said Budd. The fact that it was an evasion did not take away from its evident sincerity. "Every time I see you, you always look more beautiful than you ever did before."

"Why, Budd," Grace exclaimed, "you certainly have changed a lot. You deserve a flower for that." She pulled a rose from the cluster in her belt and, bending forward, put it in his buttonhole. He felt her hair brush against his face; its subtle fragrance thrilled him. He felt the spell of her beauty fastening upon him. With an effort he drew back. He seemed to see the doctor's warning finger raised at him.

"Thank you," he said in a hollow voice. Then a wave of contempt and indignation with himself for his weakness swept over him. He knew that Jerry was right. If he wanted to do the heroic, generous thing and cease from troubling her with love-making, he must be firm. If he should seem



"Why, Budd," Grace exclaimed, "you certainly have changed a lot"



to be brutal, it was for her own good. This was the moment for a decision.

"Well?" she said softly. "I'm waiting to hear all about it."

"I can't tell you," he said huskily. "I'm sorry, but I can't."

"Can't?" she repeated. "Why, Budd, I don't understand. Are n't we still friends?"

"Why, of course."

"Then why can't you tell me what's happened? Why have you kept away from me all this time? You don't know how it's worried me."

"Worried you? Why?"

"For fear that it was on account of something that I had done," she answered. "You may not believe me, but I've never done anything to hurt your feelings—not intentionally. I would n't for the world, and the thought of it has made me perfectly miserable."

Budd sat amazed and speechless. It was all as Jerry had told him it would be. Instead of being outraged at his treatment of her letters, here she was apologizing for something she was afraid she might have done—actually worried and anxious about him. Jerry unquestionably was right. This was the way a good woman felt responsibility for the man whose life she had wrecked, yet never

could love. If there was a spark of manhood in him, he must play his part and make her believe that she had not crushed him. Jerry had told him to laugh and be jolly, to put her at her ease with the casual offhand manner of Platonic friendship.

He forced a dismal laugh and rose from the divan.

"Now don't you ever be miserable about me," he began, "or worry either." He laughed again with an imbecile loudness. "I'm a changed man, I am. I'm not the same any more. Everything is just exactly as it should be. I mean I'm all over it. My ridiculous jealousy has all gone, my mournfulness has all gone." He gave another empty laugh. "My love has all gone. You don't have to worry any more."

The darkness hid Grace's face. She listened, frozen with amazement.

"But, Budd," she gasped, "you mean we are n't friends?"

"Why, of course, *friends*," he answered. "Is n't it great that it's all turned out so well?" He giggled nervously.

Grace made no answer. Just then Freddie Parker came through the French window from the ball-room and stood peering into the darkness.

"Hello!" he called. "I thought I'd find you out

here. Give me some of this next dance, will you?"

"She 's turned her ankle," said Budd. He rose and moved away down the veranda. He had been as noble as he could be in one evening. He felt that he could n't bear any more of it. There was a lump in his throat that ached. As he lit a cigarette his hand shook. He took a few puffs. It tasted bitter, and he threw it out upon the lawn. As he turned into the house, Jerry, who was standing in the hall, saw him and beckoned to him.

"Well," he said, "how is it going? Are you behaving yourself?"

"I don't think she 'll worry about me any more," Budd said dismally. "I 've told her not to—that I was all over it."

"And what did she say?"

"She did n't say anything," Budd answered. "She sprained her ankle. I left her with Freddie Parker out on the veranda."

Jerry seized his hand and gripped it.

"My son, you 're going strong," he said. "All you 've got to do is to keep it up. Virginia is in there dancing with a red-headed boy. Fly at it and give her a good time. And say," he added, inspecting him carefully, "you might have just one more little drink. It 's a bad thing as a rule, but in emergencies like this it might be justifiable. It

helps one to be jolly in a more graceful and natural manner."

"All right," said Budd, "but I'm worried about her ankle."

"Don't!" said Jerry. "I'll attend to that."

CHAPTER XVI

A FEW moments later Jerry made his way around the veranda to the corner where Grace was sitting with young Parker. Evidently the conversation had not been going easily, for the young man rose as Jerry came up and went back to the ball-room.

"May I sit down and visit?" he asked.

"It would be very nice," she answered.

Jerry caught the subdued note in her voice and chuckled.

"Budd told me that you 'd sprained your ankle," he said. "I thought I 'd come and see if I could be of any use."

"It 's nothing," she answered.

"A sprained ankle is a good deal," he said.

"Which one is it?"

"Why, this one, the right," she answered.

"Let me see it."

She stretched out her right foot, and Jerry, bending forward, took it. He ran his fingers over the ankle, felt it, and flexed it.

"Does that hurt?"

"A little, but not much. I think I just turned it. It's much, much better."

"I don't think there's anything serious the matter with it," he observed, straightening up. "You might put it in hot water when you go to bed and put a compress on it. But as long as it's comfortable now that's the main thing." The injured ankle was, as he had suspected, imaginary. By this time Budd and Virginia should have been dancing, and he wanted Grace to get the full effect of it.

"I wish I could do the things that some of those boys are doing in there," he observed. "Look at Gertrude Ludlow's brother!"

"He's very good," Grace answered, "but you could learn if you'd take a few lessons."

Just then Virginia floated by the window with Budd. There was a silence; then Grace said in a constrained voice:

"What a pretty girl Miss Xelva is, and so smart!"

"Is n't she?" he answered. "And so nice, too. I see you found out her name."

Grace nodded.

"She looks very nice. Is she a friend of yours?"

"Oh, in a way I know her. Haven't you ever seen her before?"

"No."

"That 's funny."

"Why? Has she been in town long?"

"Oh, a month or so."

"A month?"

"Just about, I should say."

"Stopping with friends?"

"Don't you know where she 's stopping?"

"No."

"Why, *here*. She 's been visiting Mrs. Wood-bridge."

Grace started.

"Ankle hurt?" he asked.

"Just a little. I gave it a twist." Her voice had grown more strained.

"It 's funny you haven't met her. You must have heard of her."

"Why?"

"I thought everybody had been talking about that."

"That?" she repeated.

"About her and Budd. They 've been together ever since she came. Looks to me like a desperate case on both sides. Of course I don't *know* anything about it, but having eyes, I'm expecting an announcement any day. I thought perhaps to-

night they 'd spring it on us, seeing that it was his birthday."

"I see," said Grace in a voice that was scarcely audible.

"It would be nice, don't you think?" he went on. "Budd has plenty of money, and she 's delightful. Then Mrs. Woodbridge is devoted to her, and that means something even in these days."

A weak "Yes, it would be very nice" came from the darkness beside him.

A wave of pity swept over Jerry. The girl was suffering. There was no doubt that she cared for Budd. For a moment he thought of throwing off the mask and telling her the truth, but his better judgment held him back. He must be merciless and play the game out, or all his work would go for nothing. He knew Grace well enough to be confident that she would fight to the end and that since she believed Budd to be in love with Virginia, she would do everything in her power to get him back. All that he had to do was to keep Budd in check and let events take their course. The game was all over but the shouting, and Jerry was not without a certain complacent self-satisfaction over the success with which he had worked it out.

Another thought also came to him as he sat there in the dark beside his writhing victim. At the out-

set the conception of love as a game of tactics and counter-tactics had been invented for Budd's benefit rather than evolved from his own matured convictions on the subject. Now as the facts seemed to bear out his proposition, he experienced a sense of somewhat bitter disillusionment. What he had formulated with half-humorous cynicism for a benevolent end was, after all, the truth. It was a sorry business, but one had to face the facts. He registered a vow of gratitude that he had always been wise enough to escape the fatal and humiliating pangs of jealousy. As the silence lengthened, he knew that he had to say something. The music had stopped, and a waltz began again.

"Do you think your ankle could stand a turn of this?" he asked. "You know it sometimes helps a sprain to exercise on it."

"I don't think I could," she answered huskily. "I really think I ought to go home. Somehow it's made my head ache."

"I'm awfully sorry," he said. "Do you want me to find your motor for you?"

"I'm afraid it is n't here," she answered. "I did n't order it to come for me. If you'd be good enough to telephone—"

"But I'll run you home if you are really going."

"You're very good, but, you see, Preston was

going to stop for me about half past eleven. Will you telephone him that I'm ready to go now? Just say that I've asked you to ask him to come for me right away in his runabout."

"Of course," said Jerry. "You'll wait here?"

She nodded, and he started for the telephone,

"So she's going to play Preston again," he thought; "had him up her sleeve in case of accident. Some head that girl has." As he reached the front door and was about to enter the house, an impulse led him to stop and glance at the line of automobiles drawn up along the curb. The fifth car was the Tylers' limousine with the family chauffeur sleeping peacefully at the wheel. He chuckled. "She's certainly a quick actor," he thought. He turned into the house and called up De Witt's apartment. The servant told him that Preston had gone to New York that morning and had not returned. He smiled and made his way to the library. Here he lighted a cigarette and began to figure out the next move. The cards were running against Grace. The question was how to play them. He knew that Budd's new-found independence was not to be relied upon. If Grace started a vigorous counter-offensive with De Witt, it would wilt like a plucked wild rose, and they would be back where they were at the beginning. Without

delay he must get Budd and Grace together, and let her make her effort to win him back instead of reducing him by the indirect fire of his old jealousy. She was evidently deeply in love with him. She was masterful and fearless. If she felt that she had an even chance, Jerry believed that she would not balk at doing the proposing herself. Her lesson had been a severe one and would not have to be repeated. The thing to do, therefore, was to send Budd back to her with instructions to be friendly and kind, dropping the suggestion also that possibly in years to come, if he kept himself in hand and made no demands, she might grow to care for him again.

As he flicked away the ashes of his cigarette, the part that Preston had played in this triangular comedy passed through his mind. It was clear now that Grace had never cared for him. He had amused her, and she had used him to torment Budd and protect herself from his distasteful assumptions of proprietorship. It was also probable that Preston had had no misconception of the situation. He was much too clear-headed to be taken in. If, then, he knew that he had no chance with Grace, it was the more possible that he was seriously interested in Virginia. The circumstance that she was apparently Mrs. Woodbridge's guest might well be

construed as indicating that she was far from peniless. Dressed as she was that night, she might have been the daughter of anybody great and important and in herself she was certainly a sensation. He wondered why he had never realized it before. But that had nothing to do with the matter in hand.

If Preston was really in love with her, it was an outrageous and impossible thing. He was unworthy to be her door-mat, and it was inconceivable that she could think seriously of him. Yet it was not uncommon for girls like that to throw themselves away on just such men as Preston.

He ground the lighted end of the cigarette into the ash-tray as if it had been Preston's head. As soon as he got Budd off his mind he would take a hand in the matter. However, Budd's case must be attended to first. Jerry rose and started to hunt for his patient.

Now the patient, having accomplished three turns of the room with Virginia, was intercepted by the red-headed boy, who had fallen a sudden and complete victim. Without a partner, he stepped back out of the way of the dancing. There were two things that presented themselves as next on the evening's program. First, he might take that drink that the doctor had prescribed. Sec-

ond, he ought to dance successively with his female guests. However, the evening was still young. There was plenty of time for dancing. As for the drink, he did n't want it. The scene with Grace in which he had displayed so much nobility and resolution was already troubling him. He had honestly tried to put the mind of a conscientious and anxious woman at rest, but he was aware that he had not wholly concealed his anguish, that undoubted traces of bitterness had flavored his utterances on the subject of his being a changed man. The more he thought about it, the clearer it became to him that he had bungled as usual. A nice girl who has wrecked a man's life can only be more troubled when she sees her victim trying earnestly, but vainly, to conceal his suffering. He decided, therefore, to go to her again and put things to rights. How he was to do it was not clear, but he felt that he ought to try.

Just about the time that Jerry was telephoning Preston's house, Budd slipped out of the ball-room window. As his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he made out a dim form on the divan. He advanced cautiously, making sure that no one was beside her. Within a few feet of her he stopped. He could distinguish the outline of her body reclining against the cushions, but apparently

it was without a face. This unusual circumstance occupied him for only a moment. Then strange little sounds arrested his attention. They came, muffled and irregular, from the region where, in the natural course of things, the face should have been.

Budd's first thought was that the sounds were laughter stifled with a handkerchief or a cushion. Grace had some joke that amused her beyond endurance. He could see dimly that her body shook in little spasms as in a series of uncontrollable chuckles. He drew back a step. He was in no mood for that kind of thing. Then his ears caught a note that made him start. It was not laughter. He stood frozen with apprehension and horror. Grace was weeping—sobbing her heart out, with her face buried in a sofa pillow. Only one thing could be the cause of it. His effort to be noble and set her mind at rest about him had failed more calamitously than he could have imagined.

With breath coming quickly, Budd moved noiselessly to the divan.

"Grace," he whispered.

The girl looked up apprehensively, saw who it was, and buried her face deeper in the pillow.

Calling her name again, he bent over her. She had never seemed so beautiful. Pity and love

swelled in him. Yielding to an overwhelming impulse to fold her to his heart and comfort her, he laid his hand upon her arm and bent down. She turned to shake off his hand. Her face met his, and the next moment he had kissed her fairly on the mouth.

She gave a little cry and struggled to push him away; but Budd, beside himself, clasped her fiercely, kissing her cheek and hair.

In an instant she tore herself free and stood before him, speechless and white with anger.

"You cad!" she gasped. "You—" Then bursting into a fresh outbreak of sobbing, she ran along the veranda.

Budd, stupefied with horror, stood and watched her. As she disappeared around the corner of the house, some command of his senses returned to him, and he followed. He reached the front steps in time to see her pass through the gate and turn down the line of waiting motors. A moment later he heard the snap of an automobile door. Then an engine started, and the Tylers' limousine began to move down the street. He was still watching the red tail-light when Jerry's voice brought him back to earth.

"I was just looking for you," said Jerry.
"Where's Grace?"

"She's gone," Budd answered in a hollow voice.

"Gone?"

"She just drove off in her motor." Without saying anything more, he went down the steps toward the street and, hatless as he was, hurried off aimlessly in the opposite direction to that which the motor had taken.

Jerry's first impulse had been to call after him, but he checked it. What he thought had happened was this: Grace had suddenly remembered that Preston was out of town and that she was getting in deeper by asking Jerry to telephone him. Therefore she had suddenly decided to escape in her own car, which she knew was waiting, and reserve the opening of her campaign till later. There was nothing to be done about it. After all, the main thing had been accomplished, to make Grace believe that Miss Xelva had captured Budd, and to keep Budd from giving the truth away. Loose on the streets, the boy could get into no trouble, love-sick as he might be, as long as Grace was safely at home, nursing her own wounded sensibilities. Jerry, therefore, turned back into the house, resolved to get a bite of supper and go home. Taken as a whole, he felt that the surprise party had accomplished much that he had hoped for. A man

cannot expect everything to come out according to schedule. He lit a fresh cigarette and, with the glow of satisfaction that comes from hard-won victory, turned back into the house.

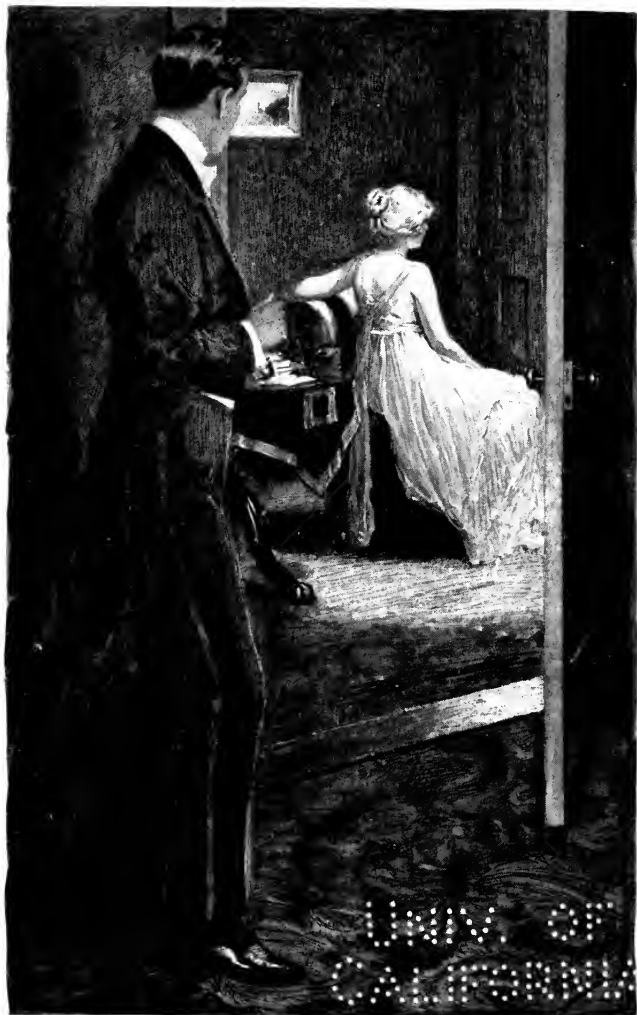
Opening off from the library was a small room with an outdoor entrance that the late Mr. Woodbridge had used as an office and den. Mrs. Woodbridge used it on occasions to interview servants and receive business callers, but for the most part it remained unoccupied, and the door leading to the library was invariably kept shut. As Jerry passed the library, on his way to the dining-room, he happened to glance in. In the corner near the office door Virginia was sitting on the arm of an easy-chair, her back toward him. The lamplight fell on her hair, making an aureole like a saint's about her little head. Jerry stopped. The thing that twice before that evening had attacked him came back again. He made no effort to combat it. Despite anything his brain might tell him, every drop of his blood, every fiber in his body, cried out that the slim girl before him was the end and object of existence. If that was love, then love had him fast, and he knew that it was nothing else. At last the great adventure had overtaken him. There was no doubt to be argued with, no

question as to whether the thing was some transitory gust of passion. The uttermost depths of his nature answered hers.

Despite the emotion that set his pulses throbbing, his mind worked quickly. He would go forward then and there and confront her with the whirlwind in his soul, confident that she would respond, knowing that she must, certain that the fire that she had kindled in him must be burning in her also.

Precisely at that moment the office door opened, Mrs. Woodbridge appeared and beckoned to Virginia. The girl rose and passed into the little room. The door closed, but apparently caught her dress, for it quickly opened again, and Jerry saw Preston De Witt standing in the doorway. A moment later Mrs. Woodbridge emerged with the satisfied smile of the woman who believes she has been acting as confidential agent for the angel of fate.

Jerry wheeled as if under a blow, and passed down the hall. The band was crashing out a rag-time with drums and cymbals. The dancers were gliding and whirling. The lights blazed. Dazed and unaware of it all, he reached the door and plunged out into the night. Which way he turned as he reached the street he did not know, but walked blindly on through the dim, tree-arched streets.



The thing that had twice before that evening attacked him
came back again

At some corner that he rounded ten minutes later he came upon Budd. They passed in the darkness without speaking. Suddenly Jerry caught himself up, looked back, and put his hand to his head. He, too, was hatless. He straightened himself, threw back his shoulders, and laughed. His laughter was loud and ringing, but there was little mirth in it. A lone policeman started and looked at him suspiciously. Then he went on and, turning into Elm Street, made his way home.

PART V

CHAPTER XVII

THE next morning Jerry appeared at the family breakfast-table outwardly much as usual, but only outwardly. He was grateful that Marion had not put in an appearance. The colonel was going through his letters and took no notice of him. Suddenly his father's face lighted.

"Well, this is amazing!" he exclaimed. "Here's your hospital, my boy! Fallen from the sky! A million to start with! More if you need it!" He brandished the letter excitedly.

Jerry gazed at him dully.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Bruce Gordon," the colonel answered. "He wants to give the town a memorial to his mother. The last time I was in New York I told him about the way you'd taken hold, and now he wants to put this matter in your hands."

"It's very good of him," Jerry said quietly.

"You don't seem to be very enthusiastic," said the colonel, with a note of disappointment in his voice. "I thought it would please you."

"It's great, of course," Jerry answered. "I've

got some work that's on my mind just at present. We'll talk about it later." He rose, leaving his eggs untasted, and went to the office. As he entered he started apprehensively. He had forgotten that Virginia would be there. Then he cursed himself. Of course he would have to meet Virginia. Why in heaven's name should n't he? If she chose to be interested in another man, was that an excuse for him to behave like an idiot, like Budd? The bell lay on the desk within reach of his hand. A touch of his finger, and she would be in the room. He would show himself that he was not in Budd's class yet—not by a jugful. He had undergone a disturbing experience, but it was past, and he was himself again. Besides, Virginia was not yet married to Preston, and a great deal might happen before she was.

However, instead of pressing the button, he lighted a cigarette, took one puff, and flung it toward the fireplace. Then in a fit of indignation with himself he rang violently. Almost instantly the door opened, and Emile entered.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Jerry.
"Where's Miss Xelva?"

"She telephone she be late this morning," the man answered.

"Is she ill?"

"She say some one come to see her, but she be here by office hours," Emile answered. "Mr. Woodbridge want to see you," he went on. "He been out here twenty minute', walk up and down, up and down, very restless."

"Show him in," commanded Jerry. He began to feel better. The absurdity of Budd's troubles helped him to realize the absurdity of his own.

"Hello!" he called out cheerily as Budd entered. "What's up now?" A glance at the patient showed that Emile's description of him as "very restless" was an understatement. The boy looked as though he had been put through a wringer. He carried a hand-bag, which he set on a chair.

"Doctor Sumner," he began abruptly, "I want you to tell my mother that you've ordered me to take a trip."

"What for?"

"For my health."

"And where am I sending you?"

"To New York."

"That's a good place to go for health. How soon are you leaving?"

"By the next train—the eleven-twenty."

"Sit down," said Jerry. "Now what is this all about?"

"It is n't necessary to talk about it. All I want to do is to get away."

"But it happens that it is necessary," Jerry answered. "Just before Grace went home last night you were going strong. Everything was fine. Then the next thing I knew, she had bolted and you 'd dashed off like a crazy man without a hat."

"I met you going home without a hat yourself a little later," Budd countered.

"That 's neither here nor there," said Jerry, high-handedly. "I want to know what happened."

"I tell you," said Budd with dignity, "that I prefer not to discuss the matter. My treatment is finished."

"And I suppose you 're a well man; in which case I don't see why I should order you off on a trip."

Budd sank into a chair and gazed at him miserably.

"Now tell me all about it," said Jerry, kindly.

Budd told him. As he drew toward the close of his account of embracing Grace on the divan, his emotions got the better of him, and he had difficulty in going on.

"It was terrible," he said, "terrible."

Jerry suppressed a desire to laugh.

"It *was* terrible," he said gravely. "But there 's one more thing I want to know. Did you see her again last night?"

"Oh, no!" the boy answered. "Of course I can never see her again after behaving as I did."

"Well," said Jerry, hopefully, "I can't see that any great harm has been done. I was afraid that you 'd given our little plan away."

Budd looked at him anxiously.

"What harm would that do?" he demanded. "Because after I got home I wrote her."

"Apologizing for having behaved in an ungentlemanly manner, I suppose."

"Yes, and a lot more."

"You did n't tell her that you loved her still?"

"I did."

"And that you 'd never cared for anybody else?"

"Yes."

"And about my part in the matter?"

"I told her everything—that I 'd tried to get over it, but that I was worse than ever."

"Budd," said Jerry, with exasperation, "you are a hopeless idiot."

"I know it," said Budd, "but I can't help it."

"Can't you see that everything was going just as we hoped and planned it should? Why in heaven's

name could n't you have let well enough alone?"

"When I found her crying out there—" the boy began.

"But don't you know what made her cry?"

"I suppose her ankle hurt her. What else could it have been?"

"O Lord!" Jerry exclaimed hopelessly. "Don't you know that she was crying because she was jealous?"

The boy looked at him in amazement.

"Because she was jealous?" he repeated incredulously.

"Is n't that enough to make her cry? Has n't it the same effect on you?"

"But who would she be jealous of?" the boy demanded.

"Why, Virginia, of course. Did n't she see you dancing with her? Could n't you guess that I was helping you along by telling her that you and Miss Xelva were great friends and for a month past she had been stopping with your mother?"

A light dawned slowly upon the boy.

"Good heavens," he exclaimed, "I believe that's it!"

"Of course it is," said Jerry. "And can't you see that if she is jealous, it proves that she must care for you?"

"Oh, no; it is n't that," Budd answered. "She 's jealous of Virginia, but that has n't anything to do with me. She 'd know that Virginia and I were just friends."

It was Jerry's turn to look surprised.

"But who else could it have to do with?" he demanded.

"Why, Preston De Witt. I don't suppose you know about that. I only found out myself last night."

A strange numbness came over Jerry. The room began to swim. The inkstand on the desk seemed to recede. The boy in the chair grew small and far away. With an effort of the will he collected himself.

"Found out what?" he demanded in a voice that he dreaded to trust.

"Why, it 's this way," Budd answered ingenuously. "You see, Grace has been completely fascinated by that fellow, but ever since he was sure of her I suppose he 's cared less about her than he did at first. It 's just your theory about love. Anyway, for the last two weeks he 's been coming to see Virginia. How he met her I don't know. I never cared to ask, and he never came to the house when I was there except once, but mother let it drop that something was up. She thinks Preston

is a very nice fellow, and of course he is bright. Well, last night after the party mother said he had been there again. He did n't know about the surprise."

"Your mother certainly is n't encouraging that bounder to make love to Virginia?" said Jerry, savagely.

"She does n't think he 's a bounder. I 'm afraid there 's a good deal to it," he added. "It 's terrible for Grace."

"Do you know anything more about this?" Jerry demanded.

"Well, Preston called to see her again this morning. I did n't know it and was just going into the library when mother stopped me. She said he was in there with Virginia. I asked her what it meant, and she smiled—you know the way women act about such things—and answered that I 'd know in time, and that Virginia was a very lucky girl, and that there would be a great surprise when it came out. It will break Grace's heart."

"The devil take Grace!" Jerry muttered under his breath. Everything bore out the conclusion that had been forced on him last night. He sat stunned and helpless for a time while the boy watched him wonderingly. Presently he swung round in his chair, rose, and squared his shoulders.

He wanted to be alone. He must have time to think. If there was anything that could be done, he must do it. If not, he must get himself in hand to face the facts. But first he must finish up with Budd.

"So you want to go to New York?" he said grimly.

Budd nodded.

"And then what?"

"I don't know."

The boy sat there crushed and hopeless. A wave of sympathy such as he had never known before swept over Jerry. Now that he was up against the same situation and knew the pain of it, he felt drawn to Budd in a new way. The boy's pathetic helplessness wrung his heart.

"Did you write her that you were going?" he asked.

Budd nodded.

"I said that she would never be bothered by me again. It was the least I could do."

"Budd," said Jerry, "I don't feel as competent to advise you as I once did. Things don't seem to work out always as they should, but I think it would be very unwise of you to clear out to-day."

"I don't see why," the boy answered. "I can't stand hanging about here any longer. I know

you 're a great doctor, but these anti-jealousy bugs certainly have n't done anything for me."

"There are lots of things in this world that a man has to stand," Jerry answered. "And I don't think your case even now is half as hopeless as a great many. In the first place, the chances are that you 're entirely wrong about Grace being jealous of Preston De Witt's attentions to Virginia. I don't think she knows about them, for one thing, and what you don't know does n't make you jealous. In the next place, I don't think she 'd care if she did know about them. Grace has never had any serious use for Preston except to torment you, and I 'm pretty sure Preston has known it as well as any one. If he could have married her, he would have been glad to do it because she 's attractive and will have money; but that 's all there is to it. Now if you could only remember this and behave in a sane, reasonable way, everything would come out all right."

"It 's easy for you to say so," said Budd, gloomily, "but it 's no use. You can't understand, because you 've never been jealous."

Jerry winced, but said nothing.

"Just loving her does n't seem to count for anything," the boy went on, "but that 's all I can do.

You're wrong about her caring for me. If she cared for me, she would n't treat me the way she does. The best thing for me is to clear out and not bother her any more."

"You can wait till to-morrow at least," said Jerry. A new idea had begun to shape itself in his mind.

"I suppose I could do that. If I do, will you promise to order me away on a trip? I don't want mother to know."

"I'll make no promises," Jerry answered. "But I'll expect you to wait. Come in to-morrow morning."

Budd rose and took his bag.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"I don't know now, but I'll tell you to-morrow," Jerry answered.

At the door the boy stopped suddenly.

"Look here," he said, "why should you think Preston has given up trying to marry Grace?"

"Have n't you just told me that your mother says he's going to marry Virginia?" Jerry answered testily.

"But why should he want to marry Virginia? She's nice, but she has n't any money."

"Perhaps he does n't know she has n't any money.

Perhaps he's in love with her. If he is n't, I give it up. You'd better leave your bag here," he added.

Budd made no comment, but set it down and went out.

As the door closed Jerry pressed his fingers against his eyes. They ached dully. The world, which had always been so pleasant and reasonable, seemed to have turned mad. As Budd suggested, why, indeed, should De Witt want to marry Virginia? But, again, why should n't he? Was n't the girl in herself the most desirable thing in the universe? No sane answer to anything seemed possible. He roused himself presently. His was not a nature to give way to despair. He must make a last effort to get Budd straightened out if only to put his own troubles out of mind. But his efforts to think were abortive. Always that slim figure was before him as he saw her sitting with her back to him just before the door opened and Mrs. Woodbridge came out of the den. With a sudden effort of the will, he pressed the bell for Emile.

The door opened, and Virginia entered. A tremor ran through him. Instead of the nurse's uniform that she usually wore she was dressed in a dark-blue, tailored suit—evidently a traveling suit, for like Budd she came in with a traveling-bag.

He stared at her, unaware of his ferocious aspect.

"Good morning," she began, then stopped, disconcerted by his manner.

"I was expecting Emile," he said. "Did you notice if my car was outside?"

"Yes, it is," she answered, her perplexity deepening.

"I've got to make a call before office hours," he announced shortly.

"Your car is in front of the house," she said, with embarrassment. "I did n't see you again last night," she went on. "Mr. Woodbridge came in after every one had gone to bed. I have n't had a chance to speak to him. Did anything go wrong?"

"Everything," Jerry answered.

She stood silent and ill at ease.

"Are you going away?" he demanded.

"I was going to ask you if you had any objection to my going away for a few days," she answered; "Emile says he's willing to look after things."

"Why, of course, I've no objection. When do you want to go?"

"The train leaves at eleven-twenty."

"You're going to New York, too?"

"Too?" she repeated, with a mystified look.

"Budd thought of taking the same train. Did n't you know it?"

She shook her head. She was silent for a moment, thinking.

"You're not angry with me?" she asked.

"Why should I be?"

"I don't know," she answered, with a note of distress. "Only—" She broke off and added: "Of course I should n't think of asking you so suddenly like this, but it's something important. I'd like to tell you all about it, but I'm half afraid." She laughed nervously.

"Have I asked you to tell me?" he snapped. "I've no right to pry into your private affairs. You're at perfect liberty to go as soon as you like and stay as long."

"You're very good," she answered, a little crushed. She shot him a look of wonder and reproach, and turned to go.

He called after her, and she stopped.

"You'd better take this," he said. He held out some new bills that he had taken from his pocket.

"But I don't need any money."

"It belongs to you. Your month is up."

She came back dejectedly and took the money.

"But this is too much," she said, protesting.

"It's your salary," he answered. "You've earned it."

She thanked him and stood uncertain. She had

never seen him like this before. What could it mean?

"Perhaps I don't understand," she faltered. "Do you expect me to come back?"

"Why, of course if you want to. This place will be open to you—*always*," he went on with a tremor in his voice, "and whatever it is that is calling you away, I hope it will bring you happiness."

He remained standing as if to intimate that the interview was ended. She looked at him non-plussed, then turned to go as Emile thrust his head in.

"I beg pardon," he said, "but Mr. De Witt wish' to speak to Miss Xelva on the telephone."

"Will you excuse me?" she said in some confusion, and went out.

Jerry paced the length of the room and back with fierce strides. "Is that man always to be turning up?" he muttered impatiently. Then the significance of the telephone message and her trip to town burst on him. Preston's aunt, his nearest relative, lived in New York. Virginia was going on to be presented to her exactly as was to be expected. It was perfectly clear, but why had n't she told him? In the next breath he was demanding of himself why in heaven's name she should. He had nothing to do with her private affairs. He was a doc-

tor, and she was an office employee, and that was all there was to it. He flung open the door that led into the house, passed through raging, and made for his motor-car, which stood beside the curb.

CHAPTER XVIII

TEN minutes later Jerry was ringing the Tylers' front door-bell. Once for all he was going to get Budd's tangle straightened out. Just how Grace would receive him was a question. Now that Budd had written her the whole story of the "treatments" and of his part in the developments of the past month, she had a right to be angry and undoubtedly would be. Moreover, Budd's revelation had lost him the whip-hand, which only the night before he seemed to have gained so completely. It was a bad business, but he must face it.

As he heard the door open, he began to turn over in his mind what he would do if she refused to see him. He decided that the best thing would be to give her no chance to refuse.

"Is Mrs. Tyler in?" he asked the maid.

The maid answered that she had gone out in the automobile about ten minutes before.

"I'm Dr. Sumner," he announced. "I have an appointment to see Miss Tyler professionally."

The girl raised no question, but took his hat and

led him up-stairs. She knocked, opened the door, and ushered Jerry into a little sitting-room where Grace was lying on a sofa with an unopened book upon her lap. She looked up at the intruder apparently without surprise, smiled somewhat wanly, and held out her hand.

This struck Jerry as odd.

"Ankle pretty bad?" he asked.

She nodded.

"You were good to come so quickly. Mother could have only just telephoned you."

So she had telephoned for him; but why? Why had she wanted to see him? Was it to berate him? Her reception of him indicated nothing of that sort.

"I was just starting out," he answered truthfully. "It only took a minute to run over. You got away from me last night," he added after a pause. "I came right back after telephoning De Witt and found that you had gone."

"I know," she answered. "My ankle hurt so I could n't bear it. And after you had gone, I remembered that mother said she was going to send the car for me. So I just went."

"I dare say that was wise," he said dryly. "The best place for an ankle of that kind is bed. But what can I do for you now?"



"I dare say that was wise," he said dryly



She avoided his look.

"You see, I felt terribly at leaving you without an explanation after I had sent you to telephone Preston. I wanted to tell you I was sorry and—well, I wanted to find out what he said when he came and found I'd gone."

"How do you know he came?" demanded Jerry.

"Well, did n't he?"

"When I telephoned his apartment, they said he was in New York."

"But he came?"

"Yes, he came," said Jerry, grimly.

"Surely not to see Budd."

"No, not to see Budd," he assented. "Have n't you called him up this morning?"

"I could n't get him," she answered. "He was out. They said he had a pressing business engagement?"

Jerry laughed hoarsely, and their eyes met. Suddenly he realized that she had read what was in his mind.

"You don't mean that *he's* trying to make a hit with that Miss Xelva?"

"I have n't mentioned Miss Xelva," Jerry answered.

"But it's so. She's very attractive," Grace

added with an effort. A moment later her lip trembled and burying her face in the pillow, she began to sob.

"Perhaps I'd better have a look at the ankle," Jerry said after he had given her a little time; "I know how the pain gets on one's nerves. I don't suppose you slept much."

She raised her head with an effort, smiled dolefully, and began to mop her eyes.

"I'm the limit, am I not?" she said brokenly.

"You're all right," he answered. "That is, you would be if you let me take charge of the case."

"How do you mean?" she demanded, but he knew by the way she avoided meeting his eyes that she understood.

"Let's talk plainly," he said. "I know all about your ankle and how it came to make you go home. More than that, I've got a cure for it if you want to be cured."

Her color rose, and she shook her head.

"You don't know what you're talking about," she said fiercely.

"I know perfectly well what I'm talking about," he retorted. "All you've got to do is to promise to obey instructions."

"You're a very extraordinary man," she observed.

"I am," he admitted, "and I'm going to tell you some very extraordinary things. In the first place, as the fortune-tellers say, you're going to receive a letter from a man you're very fond of. It's probably on a tray in the pantry at this moment, having been forgotten by the maid that brought up your breakfast. Now when it comes, I want you to give it to me without reading it."

"The pieces are in that waste-basket," she said in an icy voice. "If you wish them, take them."

"You did n't read it?"

"Naturally."

"You knew it was from Budd?"

"I never wish to see or speak to Budd again!" she answered explosively. "He's not a gentleman."

"I know what Budd did," he said quietly, "and you know that he never would have done it if he had n't thought you were suffering terribly from your ankle."

"That made it all the worse," she broke out. "I don't want any one to be sorry for me."

"But if a person likes you he can't help being sorry for you."

"What!" she cried, and glared at him.

"I said if a person likes you he can't help being sorry for you. You don't seem to know much

about men," he went on. "You think that a man who likes one woman can't like another at the same time, but that is n't so. Now I'm going to talk to you like an uncle. If Budd is interested in Miss Xelva, it's because you've driven him to it. Never mind how I've found it out; but I happen to know that he's cared for you for more than a year and you've treated him like a dog. He's sweet and simple and devoted, and because he was jealous, as any man would be of a girl as attractive as you are, you flaunted De Witt at him and made his life a burden. Is it any wonder that when a gentle, sympathetic woman turned up, he should try to find some consolation? Just how far it's gone I don't pretend to know, but I can guess how far it will go if you don't change your tactics. If you don't want to get him back, all right. But if you do, and I believe you still have a chance, you've got to take him as he is and let his loyalty and devotion make up for his being a little exacting. You see he's very young and—well, he loves you a good deal."

"But he does n't," she answered falteringly. "He told me so himself last night."

"Can't you understand how a boy like Budd would tell you that?" he demanded. "He thinks he only bores you and that his attentions make you

unhappy. The brave and generous thing for him to do in such a case is to tell you not to worry about him. And that's what he tried to do. Of course the danger is that he'll get to believe it himself and ask Miss Xelva to marry him."

"You think he has n't asked her yet?"

"I know he has n't."

Grace looked away and sat very still. A struggle was going on within her. Suddenly she turned toward him and held out her hand. He took it.

"Now you're talking sense," he said, smiling.

"You've been very good," she answered meekly. "But why have you taken all this trouble?"

"Why should n't I?" he answered. "I'm fond of Budd and I'm fond of you. Besides, there is n't any too much happiness in this old world. If one can straighten out a tangle, it's a good day's work."

She gazed at him searchingly.

"Somehow you've changed," she said, "or I've misjudged you. I should n't have thought you'd understand this way."

"Stuff!" he answered. He felt his color rise, and he looked away to avoid her gaze. "I've got to go back to the office," he went on. "I'm late now. Good-by and good luck! Remember what

I tell you. Lose no time in proposing, and when you've married him, practise appreciating him. It's the only way to keep things." He grasped her hand and was gone.

Grace heard his descending footfall on the stair, the closing of the front door, and the starting of his motor. She lay back on the couch, her eyes closed, thinking. A strange surmise had come to her at the moment when he avoided her eyes. Something certainly had happened that had worked a subtle soul change in Jerry. It was n't her fancy. He was different. Suddenly she found it. The man was in love. As surmise crystallized into conviction, she started up, a vague suspicion taking possession of her. With a quick movement she reached the basket where she had deposited the torn scraps of Budd's unread letter and drew it towards her. She must see with her own eyes what Budd had really said. She had paste and tissue-paper at hand. She would put the torn pages together again. She would make sure that what Jerry had told her it contained was the truth. To her dismay she found the basket empty. The maid must have removed the contents when she did the room. She hesitated a moment and then rang the bell.

Julia, the housemaid, came promptly.

"I put an address that I wanted in the waste-basket," Grace said. "Where do you empty those things?"

"Frank burned all the waste paper in the furnace this morning," the girl answered. "I'm sorry."

"It's of no great importance," said Grace disingenuously. When she was alone again she went to the telephone. Her impulse was to call up Budd and ask him to come. If Budd was not interested in Miss Xelva, he would be glad to come. If he were—well, she could quickly tell. What perplexed her was Jerry's motive for going to the pains he had taken to bring Budd and herself together. A man who had just fallen in love was apt to be occupied with his own affairs. The psychology of men in love was one of the things she understood best.

Suddenly the full truth flashed upon her. Jerry was in love with Virginia. Whatever might be Budd's real attitude toward herself, his attentions to Miss Xelva stood in the doctor's way. He wanted to get Budd safely side-tracked. To the circumstance that Preston had dropped into the party to see Miss Xelva the night before she did not attach much importance. She knew Preston like a book. He was not the kind of rival that would disturb a man like Jerry. Jerry would

realize that his cleverness and superficial charm would make no deep appeal to a girl such as Virginia appeared to be. On the other hand, Budd, with his sweetness, his boyish simplicity, his loyalty, and his capacity for devotion, might very well be feared. She feared herself for the effect those qualities might already have made on the girl and the girl's response to them. It was, therefore, possible that Jerry as an interested party had been grinding his own ax rather than hers. She must make sure.

She called the familiar number and in tremulous tones asked if Mr. Budd was at home.

"Why, no, Miss," said Hartley. "Mr. Budd left the house a few minutes ago. I believe he was going to New York."

"New York?" she repeated.

"That's what I understood, Miss; on the eleven-twenty."

"Do you know when he'll be back?"

"He did n't say, Miss."

She hung up, baffled for the moment. Then resolving on another tack, she called Preston's office again. She would summon him. She knew him so well that she was sure she could find out if he was giving Mrs. Woodbridge's guest what she called a "serious rush," and, if he was, what he

thought of Budd's relation to the girl. The next moment she recognized Preston's voice.

"You're a nice person," she began banteringly. "Came to the party last night and never even danced with me. What do you think of yourself?"

"Well, I'll be hanged!" said Preston in frank amazement. "How did you know I was there?"

"I know everything," Grace answered. "Don't you know that yet?"

"Did Budd tell you?"

"No."

"Who did?"

"Can't tell you; heard it in confidence. Heard a good deal more, too."

"That's nice," said Preston, recovering his usual equanimity.

"If you'll come up and see me right away, I might drop you a helpful hint or two."

"But I can't get away."

"Fudge!"

"It's absolutely impossible."

"Got a date with Miss Xelva?"

"Quit your kiddin'," answered Preston, imperturbably.

"But I'm not kidding; I hear it's all over but the wedding march."

"Your intelligence bureau must have broken down," he answered. "Did n't you know she was out of town this morning?"

"Out of town?"

"Sure. You ought to change your detectives. She's taking the eleven-twenty for New York."

Grace's heart stopped beating.

"That must be quite a blow," she managed to say.

"Yes, it is," he answered. "If I can, I'll stop in this afternoon rather late."

"All right," she said mechanically, and put the receiver on the hook. She rose unsteadily from the chair, made her way to the couch, and dropped miserably upon it. Budd and Virginia together on their way to town! Her suspicions of Jerry Sumner were confirmed. That letter that she had destroyed doubtless said only what Budd had told her himself the night before with perhaps some lame apology for his outrageous behavior. He was lost to her, and, anyway, she never wanted to lay eyes on him again. He was a cad and a brute. She buried her face in the pillow and fell to sobbing.

CHAPTER XIX

ON his way back to the office after leaving Grace, Jerry allowed himself to indulge in certain self-congratulatory reflections. By a fortunate chance Grace had not read Budd's letter, and as a result of his visit the troubled course of their young loves seemed likely to have a prompt and happy ending. Of Grace's telephoning he was, of course, ignorant. He likewise began to take a brighter view of his own personal troubles.

Fortunately for all of us, hope is a counselor that, driven out the door, returns by the window. Already Jerry began to find reasons why the thing he dreaded most might not really happen. Granted that Virginia and Preston were actually engaged and that she had gone on to New York to meet his aunt, there was still a long distance between that and their getting married. Although Preston was doing well at the law, his income was not such as would permit him to marry a penniless girl immediately. Beyond that Jerry had a conviction that Preston did not yet know she was penniless. Preston had probably made his deduc-

tions from her manner of dress, her jewels, and her obvious accustomedness to luxury, as well as from the circumstance that she was Mrs. Woodbridge's guest. Virginia, with her simplicity and idealism, would probably have considered it degrading even to think about money at such a time, and while she must have told him that she was training to be a nurse, that need not have implied that it was from the necessity of making a living.

Jerry therefore figured that Preston had a severe shock waiting for him when the truth came out. Furthermore, something told him that a nature as fine as Virginia's would shrink from a nature like Preston's when she had time enough really to understand it. It was all as logical as two and two make four that given time enough the Preston De Witt menace would disappear in thin air. The trouble was, however, and Jerry realized it with dismay, that sober reason was an unstable foundation. When he most needed it, it was n't there. All his wise advice to Budd became meaningless words when that wave of passionate, unreasoning jealousy swept over him. If ever there was a case of "physician heal thyself," he was it. If only the serum had been a real thing, he would have taken a gallon of it; but it was n't. He must

fight the battle unaided as other men had to fight it. His scorn of himself was intense when he realized that he was in the same pitiable category as Budd, but scorn of oneself was not a remedy. All he could do was to work and wait and hope and tell himself that he was a fool. Of these, work was the most satisfactory. The thought that his efforts in Budd's behalf at last promised to be successful was distinctly comforting.

The first thing he did when he settled himself at his desk was to call up Budd. He would get hold of the boy and send him to Grace at once. The word that he received from Hartley was, of course, the same that Grace had received but a few minutes before. Confirming it, he noted that Budd's bag had disappeared. He uttered an exclamation of annoyance and pressed the bell.

"Bring Stone in if he's out there," he said as Emile appeared.

"*Bien, Monsieur,*" said the man. He laid two notes upon the desk and withdrew.

Jerry took one of the envelops and tore it open. It contained a line from Budd.

"I can't stand this town any longer," he wrote. "I'm taking the 11:20. Will put up at the Harvard Club."

Jerry reached for a telegraph blank.

"Take next train back," he wrote. "Call me up when you arrive." Then he took the other envelop, and started as he saw that the handwriting was Virginia's.

At this moment Stone came in with his arm in a sling. Jerry nodded to him vacantly, and ran his eye over the contents. It read:

You have been so good to me that I hardly know how to say what I feel I ought to say. In spite of what I told you this morning I don't think I shall come back to the office. Please always remember that your goodness and patience with me have been the best things in my life. I wish that I could repay you. If you want me to get you in New York a really competent nurse for the office, I should be glad to try.

Always yours sincerely,

VIRGINIA XELVA.

He thrust the sheet of paper in his pocket and turned to the machinist.

"Well, Stone," he said, "how is the arm this morning?" There was a strange mist before his eyes, in which the room and the patient swam unsteadily. He gripped the arm of his chair till it began to clear.

"Better, Doctor," Stone answered. "I had a good night."

"We'll have a look at it," said Jerry. He rose

and began unfastening the bandages. The arm was doing well. He changed the dressing and sent the man away.

After Stone came a woman with neuralgia, one of Mrs. Woodbridge's protégées, then a boy with a cold, then others. It was after twelve when Emile announced that the waiting-room was empty. Jerry lighted a cigarette that he immediately threw away and, taking Virginia's note from his pocket, read it twice.

It was the kind of note a girl going away with the intention of getting married would be apt to write except for the phrase, "Your goodness and patience with me have been the best things in my life." If Virginia felt that way toward him would she go off without telling him the truth? It hardly seemed likely, though, of course, Preston might have insisted on absolute secrecy for the present. Suddenly a new theory burst on him. It was wild, yet he grasped at it as the drowning man at the straw. Preston had found out about her having no money and had back-pedalled. The girl, cruelly hurt, was leaving town for the same reason that Budd was leaving. But, then, how could this be made to square with what Mrs. Woodbridge had told Budd, or with the match-maker's smile with which she had come out of the den the night be-

fore? If Preston had confided the news of his engagement to Mrs. Woodbridge he could n't have backed out so abruptly no matter what he had found out. He would have used a more delicate method. Preston was no bungler. In the end Jerry derived little comfort from the note. He was putting it back in his pocket when a step behind him made him start, and turning, he saw his father.

"I hope you're lunching at home," said the colonel, with a smile.

"I was expecting to," Jerry answered. "Why?"

"Bruce Gordon has just telephoned that he's in town and will lunch with us. Of course he wants to talk hospital with you. You remember him, don't you?"

Jerry nodded.

"I have n't seen him since I was a kid. I used to be afraid of him."

The colonel laughed.

"His bark is worse than his bite."

"They don't seem to think so in New York," said Jerry.

"A man who has made millions does n't have to have good manners," said the colonel. "Moreover, I suppose one can't make money without also making enemies, but he's been my friend for fifty

years, and I want him to be yours. Now in discussing this hospital business," the colonel went on, "speak your mind and disagree with him if you think his ideas are wrong. He does n't get on with people who give way to him."

"I'll do my best," said Jerry.

Marion was lunching with the Ludlows, and the three men sat down together. Contrary to his expectations, Jerry found himself drawn to the financier. It was possible that under the influence of his boyhood's associations he was more human and kindly than usual, but at all events Jerry liked him. He was a huge man, nearly six feet four. A little stoop of the shoulders and a tinge of gray in his hair indicated that he was no longer young, but the vigor of his voice and manner was unimpaired. As the meal progressed, the twinkle in his cold, piercing eyes kindled oftener. He seemed to be laying aside business cares and to be enjoying himself.

The meal progressed, and he made no mention of the hospital. Neither of the Sumners introduced the subject, and they went into the library for coffee. As Gordon lighted his cigar, he settled himself in his chair and turned to the colonel.

"We're going to get down to business now," thought Jerry.

There was a silence during which the financier puffed vigorously at his cigar. Then with harsh abruptness he said:

"Addison, you remember my sister Amy?"

"Naturally."

Jerry saw an expression of amazement cross his father's face.

"I don't think I ever was quite fair to her," Gordon went on as if he were discussing the weather. "I wanted her to marry you. But she did n't want to marry you, and you did n't want to marry her, and I suppose you each had something to say about it."

"We were more like brother and sister," said the colonel.

"You were a better brother to her than I was," said Gordon. "But that can't be changed now. She went her way, and I went mine. I suppose I should have forgiven her just as mother did if she had n't died." He broke off, and his eyes met Colonel Sumner's. "That was a good while ago, Addison."

"It was," said the colonel.

"We're pretty close to being through," Gordon went on. "How quick it all passes! Yesterday we were like this,"—he nodded toward Jerry,—
"to-day we're what we are—lonely old men—and

to-morrow we quit. Do you ever stop to wonder what it's all about?"

"The trouble with you, Bruce," said the colonel, "is that you ought to have married."

"So I ought to have bought steel at eight and a half, but I did n't. You can't play the game by thinking what you ought to have done, Addison. I have n't a son, and thinking about it won't give me one; so I don't think about it."

"Still," said the colonel, consolingly, "there are other compensating things."

"Perhaps," said the financier. "But you've had all the best of it, Addison; you were the lucky one. Don't forget that. If I had my life to live over, I suppose I'd live it just as I have and regret at the end of it that I had n't stayed in Elmford and married like you, and that's all you can say about it."

"Still, it must give you a great deal of satisfaction," said the colonel, "to do all that you are able to do for other people. Think of this hospital you're giving. Think of the thousands it will help."

Gordon made no answer. He struck another match and relighted his cigar.

"Jerry," he said shortly, "do you know a young man in Grant's office named De Witt?"

"I know him," said Jerry.

"Bright fellow, is n't he?"

"Every one says so."

"I wish you 'd get him on the telephone for me. I want to speak to him."

"Of course," said Jerry, and rose.

"I think I might as well tell you," Gordon went on to the colonel, "that having no family of my own, I'm on the way to acquiring one."

The colonel gazed at him, open-mouthed.

"You mean you're going to get married?"

"No," said Gordon, laughing; "not so bad as that. I'm contemplating a form of adoption."

"Not Preston De Witt?" exclaimed the colonel.

"I don't know. It might come to that—no one ever knows." He smiled grimly.

Jerry stopped on his way to the door, his eyes riveted on the financier.

"Just what do you mean?" the colonel demanded.

"It seems that Amy had a child," Gordon answered. "She died soon after it was born. Now the father is dead, and the child has turned up, and I'm fool enough at the age of sixty-two to embark upon the career of uncle, that is, if it decides to accept me. Apparently it's in some doubt about it."

"Have you seen it?"

"That 's what I 'm here for."

"Is Amy's child in Elmford?"

"That 's what Grant tells me. There seems to be no reason to doubt it. It 's a young person by the name of Virginia Xelva."

"Virginia Xelva!" cried the colonel, aghast. "She 's here in this house—a nurse in Jerry's office!"

Gordon looked at him sharply. He was not in the habit of showing surprise.

"I thought she was stopping with Caroline Woodbridge."

"She is, but she 's with Jerry during office hours. To think of Amy's daughter being in my home and I not knowing it!"

Gordon turned to Jerry, who was standing dumbly in the doorway.

"May I see her?" he asked.

"She 's in New York," Jerry answered. "She went this morning on the eleven-twenty."

Gordon uttered an impatient ejaculation.

"I wired Grant's office this morning not to send her on. Get me De Witt at once!"

Jerry went out to the telephone. From the hall he heard the voices of the two men. Gordon was asking the colonel if he had seen her and what sort

of girl she was. But the voices sounded thin and far away. His heart was beating like a trip-hammer. It was clear now why Mrs. Woodbridge had taken such a fancy to Virginia, and why Preston had been making love to her. For a fortnight he had known that she was Bruce Gordon's niece. Under Grant's direction he had doubtless been investigating the case for Mr. Gordon and supplying the proofs of Virginia's identity. For a fortnight he had known that Virginia was a great heiress. The girl, touched and flattered by his attentions, had been swept off her feet. Preston had her and would never let go his hold. As Jerry's last hope snapped, a blind rage swept him. He understood now how Budd had felt. If he could have clasped his fingers around Preston's throat he would have committed murder joyously. But Preston's throat not being in his clasp, he called Grant's office and told the clerk who answered that Mr. Gordon wished to speak with Mr. De Witt. He went back to the library, reported that De Witt was on the wire and then, seizing his hat, went hurriedly out.

PART VI

CHAPTER XX

AS Jerry came out of the house depressed with the knowledge that Virginia was Bruce Gordon's niece and presumable heir and that Preston De Witt had been aware of these facts for a fortnight, he encountered the postman coming up the steps.

"Shall I put your mail in the box or will you take it?" the man asked.

"I'll take it," Jerry answered. The little packet apparently consisted of bills and advertising circulars. He was about to thrust it into his pocket when his eye caught a familiar handwriting. It was on an envelop that bore the printed name of a New York hotel. Mechanically he tore it open and began to read:

DEAR OLD JERRY:

Here I am on what they call the Great White Way, getting my appetite back after the trip across "the pond." The pater and I had another little disagreement, and the result is that I've been shipped out to your wild and woolly Occident. What I now have to propose is this, that we have a month in Wyoming together after elk and

mountain sheep. You can't get out of it with a telegraphic no, for I'm coming Thursday to your bucolic Elmford to debate the matter in person and carry you off. We all lamented your absence at the moor, but the birds were scarce and sport poor, so your virtue had the reward of not missing much. This ought to reach you Wednesday. That is to-morrow, and the next day I shall see you. You might wire me that you are home. So no more at present from

Yours faithfully,
MARCHY.

"P. S. I saw Mildway just before sailing, and he sent a lot of messages which I have forgotten."

"By Jove!" Jerry muttered, "I'll go to Wyoming!" He got into his car and drove to the telegraph-office, where he wired Marchbanks that he would meet him Thursday morning on the train leaving New York at ten. Then he headed over the bridge and made his way to the open country. He had no idea where he was going. He only wanted to get away from everything. Presently he was tearing over the hills in violation of all known speed laws.

In the meanwhile Budd and Virginia had been adventuring into the unknown, separately.

By the time Budd reached the station that morning, the train was already coming in. He dashed

up to the ticket window, got his ticket, and was starting for the train when he saw Virginia on the platform waiting to board the parlor car. Having no idea of her intentions, he jumped at the conclusion that Jerry had discovered his departure and had hastily despatched her on his trail. Just how Jerry could have found out that he was not waiting till the next day in time to get Miss Xelva aboard the eleven-twenty he did not stop to think out. As a matter of fact Budd was too agitated to think out anything. By this time existence had resolved itself into mere consciousness of torment. What he wanted he could never have. His was a blighted existence. All that he could expect was liberty to crawl away like a wounded beast and wait forty or fifty years for death to bring release, and now even this modest privilege was about to be denied him.

He had been intending to crawl as far as the Grand Central Station in a Pullman chair, but when he saw Virginia boarding the Pullman, he drew back till she was out of sight and then hurriedly made his way to one of the day-coaches. On reaching New York he managed to be the first person to leave the forward car and bolted for Vanderbilt Avenue at a speed likely to make female pursuit fruitless. At Forty-Fourth Street

he turned west and three minutes later was in a position of relative safety within the portals of his club. As he asked for a room the clerk handed him Jerry's telegram.

Budd's impulse was to tear the sheet of yellow paper into bits and let it go at that. Taking the first train back was unthinkable. He wanted no more advice or treatment. However, when he had gone to his room he decided that he owed something to Jerry and finally called him up on the telephone. The call reached Jerry as he was attending to the last patient of the morning, just before his father had come in with the announcement that Bruce Gordon was coming to lunch.

"I just got your telegram," Budd began. "Why do you want me to take the next train back?"

"Because I thought you might like to marry a certain lady," Jerry answered.

"But don't you understand that's all off?" Budd stammered.

"Look here," said Jerry. "I have n't time for foolishness. I've just seen her, and my advice is to come back at once."

"But has she forgiven me for doing what I did last night?"

"She has."

"But in my letter I told her I was going away and would n't bother her any more."

"Can't you understand," said Jerry, with some exasperation, "that she wants to be bothered? She found that out as soon as she thought you were interested in some one else."

"Did you tell her I was n't?"

"I did, but I said you very well might be unless she married you in the course of the week."

"Then you think I really ought to come back?"

"If you don't, you ought to be locked up."

"But if I go to see her how do you think I ought to begin?"

There was no answer. A click at the other end of the wire told him that Jerry had hung up. He considered calling him again, but thought better of it. Jerry evidently meant that he would have to work that out for himself.

Budd found the news he had just received hard to appreciate. After a certain point a starving man feels no hunger. Budd was too numb for elation. However, he knew he must go back. He proceeded down to the office, consulted a time-table, and found that he could get a train at four-ten. Then he gave up his room and ordered himself some lunch. A little before four he called a taxi

and started for the station. Feeling that he was now immune from pursuit, he bought a parlor-car seat, and with ten minutes to spare he sauntered over to the telegraph-office and sent a wire to Hartley asking him to have a car meet him at Elmford. He decided that on arriving he would go at once to Grace's. Then he bought the evening papers and went aboard the train. His seat was near the end. He glanced down the lines of passengers, saw no one that he knew, and sat down. The train started and was gathering headway when he glanced up from his paper and saw the porter with a hand-bag coming down the aisle, followed by Virginia. The next moment she dropped into the empty chair beside him.

"Why, Budd!" she exclaimed. "Isn't this funny?"

"Yes, it is," said Budd, without enthusiasm.

"I looked for you this morning on the eleven-twenty," she went on. "When did you come to New York?"

"How did you know I was coming?" he answered evasively.

"Dr. Sumner told me."

He glanced at her suspiciously, but her manner was frank. She seemed to have nothing to conceal.

"He did n't tell you to come along and kind of watch me?" he demanded.

She shook her head.

"Why, no," she answered. "Why should he? I thought everything was going very well with you."

"Well, it is now, but it had n't been."

"You mean you had another set-back?"

He nodded.

"Well, I 'm sure that it will all be all right," she said, smiling. "I had an idea that you had come to buy something at the jeweler's."

He colored.

"What have you been doing in New York?" he demanded.

"Just business," she answered. "And when I got here I found that I had come on for nothing and had to come right back."

"It had n't anything to do with me?"

"Nothing. It will be funny not to be getting up at six o'clock to-morrow morning and going through our training," she went on. "Do you think you 'll miss it?"

He shook his head.

"I think I shall," she said. "However, your mother has asked me to stop on for a few days longer."

"Do you think you'll miss your work at the doctor's?" he asked.

It was Virginia's turn to be surprised.

"How did you know that I'd given it up?" she demanded.

"Why, I don't know," he stammered. "I just supposed naturally—"

She looked confused and opened her paper, and Budd did likewise.

Conversation languished after that. Budd read the front-page headlines three times without any definite impression of the day's news till Virginia swung her chair around and left him to undisturbed thought. Her appearance had created new complications. He could hardly go off in his car and leave her standing on the platform to hunt for a taxi when she was staying in his house. Yet he grudged the time it would take. It would be late enough before he could reach Grace's if he went direct from the station. However, there was nothing else to do. This settled, he gave himself up to the embarrassing problem of meeting Grace. As her last words to him had expressed the desire of never seeing him again, he could hardly say he had just dropped in to see how her ankle was, neither could he mention the doctor's intervention. He knit his brows in perplexity, but by the time

the train was drawing near Elmford he had invented an opening that seemed satisfactory.

Grace could be counted on to greet him with a chilly "How do you do?" After this he would begin: "I wanted to speak to you about last night, Grace. As I told you in my letter I'm sorry that I forgot myself and acted as no gentleman should."

There was nothing she could object to in this. Then he would go on more boldly. "I can't keep my promise not to bother you again. It means too much to me. Never since that afternoon when you let me know you cared for me have I ever thought of any one else. If I could only make you understand that everything I am, or hope to be, belongs to you, that all my happiness is just in doing for you and caring for you and loving you, I would die happy. I know I have bothered you and been jealous without any real reason and I'm sorry, for I want you always to have your own friends and that sort of thing, but I believe now that if you will only let things be as they were before I sha'n't be jealous and unreasonable any more. I have had my lesson, Grace, and I want now to care for you in the way you want me to. Will you give me another chance?"

At this, he pictured Grace softening and her wonderful smile breaking out. "I'll try to forgive

you, Budd, for last night," she would say. "You've made me very unhappy, but—"

And then would come his opportunity.

He was aroused by the train stopping at Elmford.

"I've ordered the car to be here," he said to Virginia. "I'll run you home, but we'll have to hurry for I've got some business to attend to afterwards."

"But I can get a taxi," she urged.

He shook his head, insisted on taking her little bag, and led the way out. As he stepped down upon the platform he stopped short, and a thrill ran through him. He saw Mrs. Tyler getting off the car ahead. *Her* mother had been upon the same train. It was an omen. His impulse was to rush up to her, but he checked himself, realizing that it would consume precious moments. Just then Hunter, his mother's chauffeur, appeared and took the bags, and at the same moment he saw Mrs. Tyler's chauffeur making his way to Mrs. Tyler. She was being looked out for, so he turned sharply and, beckoning to Virginia, followed Hunter to the automobile.

Fifteen minutes later, having left Virginia at his mother's house, the car drew up in front of the

Tylers'. He looked nervously at his watch. It was a quarter past six. The question now was whether Grace would be home. He rang the bell. As the maid opened the door, he heard the rustle of a woman's dress and distinctly saw Grace cross the hall and enter the library. She wore a hat and had evidently just come in.

"Please tell Miss Tyler that Mr. Woodbridge wishes to see her," he said tremulously.

The maid, who was new, gazed at him mildly and withdrew.

He began running over the discourse that he had prepared. "I wanted to speak to you about last night. As I told you in my letter—" he repeated. The lump in his throat was making articulation difficult. He saw the maid reappear in the hall and come toward him. He braced himself. In another moment he would be in the library face to face with all that made life worth living.

The maid reached him.

"Miss Tyler says she is sorry, but she has just come from the station where she was meeting her mother, and begs to be excused."

Unaware that she had uttered the mandates of life and death, the maid passed him and opened the door.

Mechanically he passed out, his hat still in his hand. A "Hello, Budd," sounded in his ears, and he saw Preston De Witt mounting the steps.

"Hello," he muttered, and went on to the waiting car. The chauffeur pressed the self-starter, but the engine failed to start. Budd saw the front door open and Preston go in.

"Something is the matter with the battery," the chauffeur announced after another effort. "I guess I'll have to crank." Three minutes elapsed before he had the engine going. Preston still remained in the house. Then the car started, and they moved down the street. As they turned the corner two blocks beyond, Budd looked back, but saw no sign of Preston. Grace had received him. There was no doubt about it. Meeting her mother at the station was not a reason for sending him away. Suddenly it flashed upon him that Grace had seen him get off the train with Virginia and drive away with her. If Preston had not been there, he would have gone back and insisted upon an explanation. As it was, the only thing to do was to go home. If the doctor had really fixed things for him once again, he had thoroughly muddled them.

CHAPTER XXI

BUDD'S supposition that Grace had seen him get off the train and drive away with Virginia was entirely correct. In an instant her suspicions as to Jerry's double-dealing were confirmed. Budd was a cad again, Jerry a deceiver; the whole world was against her. Not unnaturally, therefore, when Budd was announced she was outraged at the insolence of such a proceeding.

As the front door closed on him Grace came out of the library and started up-stairs. Meanwhile the maid had admitted Preston. They met face to face. She was not sorry to see him. She knew that Budd must know he was there. If she still had the power to hurt, she was going to use it, and at all events Preston could cover her defeat.

"Come in," she said. "I was just going to take off my hat. Do you want some tea?"

"No tea," he answered. "I can only stop a minute. I came in to see you about our golf to-morrow." He followed her into the drawing-room and dropped into a chair.

"Don't tell me you 're going to chuck."

"I 'm afraid I 'll have to," he answered. "Hon-

estly, I'm simply loaded up with work. My desk looks as if an avalanche had buried it."

She laughed mockingly.

"You've got to do better than that."

"It's the honest fact," he protested. "Mr. Grant is away at Bar Harbor, Bruce Gordon is in town, and the whole office is upside down."

"Is Bruce Gordon a client?"

He nodded.

"For all that," she said, "I've never known you to let business interfere with golf. I guess the stories that I hear must be true."

"What stories?"

"I feel very much hurt," she went on. "I thought that naturally I'd be the first one you'd tell about it and now I find out that for two weeks you've been busy and not a word."

"This town is some place for news," observed Preston, cautiously.

"I saw her last night," Grace continued. "I thought she was lovely."

"I don't see that you need to be told anything," he said grimly.

"Oh, my, we've only begun!" cried Grace. "In the first place, I want to know how you met her? I never supposed that you were very intimate with the Woodbridges."

"Are you kiddin'?"

"Not in the least. I want to know. I suppose you'll say it was business."

"It was."

"So she's a client too?"

"In a way."

"But I thought she was a penniless, self-supporting nurse. People like that don't go to you."

Preston looked at her and laughed.

"Can you keep a secret?"

"I'm a tomb, as you ought to know."

"Well, as they say in melodrama, she's not what she appears to be. The fact is she's a long-lost orphan or, rather, the long-mislaid niece of a prosperous uncle."

"And the uncle?"

"The uncle happens to be Bruce Gordon."

Grace gasped. The significance of this announcement was the same to her as it had been to Jerry. She knew Preston too well to have any doubt as to his probable intentions toward Bruce Gordon's niece. The possibility that, after all, Jerry had told her the truth flashed upon her.

"But I never heard of such a thing!" she cried.

"One rarely does hear of such a thing," he said quietly.

"But how was she discovered?"

"Well, it seems that her mother married a Swiss rather against the wishes of the family and died soon after the daughter was born. Two or three years later her father was killed in a railway accident, and the girl was brought up by his sister. The sister married recently, as women sometimes do, and the girl decided to seek her fortune and hunt up her grandmother. When she got to Elmford she found that Grandmother Gordon was a blessed memory. Apparently she had never heard of Uncle Bruce, and funds being low, she started in to support herself. She got a job in Sumner's office and, rumor has it, was installed by him at the Woodbridges' to revive Budd from a hitherto unsuspected attack of the pip."

They exchanged glances, and Preston went on:

"Mrs. Woodbridge, who had known her mother, was struck by the resemblance of the girl to her old friend, questioned her, and the story came out. Mr. Gordon was notified, proofs of identity were sent on, and to-day Miss Xelva went to New York to see him. After the manner of the great, he took it into his head to come to Elmford without letting us know about the change of plans; so they crossed on the road, and I've had the pleasant job of explaining how it was all my fault. I've tele-

phoned her to take the first train back. So I hope that by this time all is well."

"Did Budd take her to New York?" Grace asked shortly.

"I don't think so. As far as I know no one knew she was going. The ridiculous girl was not at all sure that she wanted to see or have anything to do with Uncle Bruce; so she kept the whole matter very quiet."

"But why?"

"You can search me. Mrs. Woodbridge tells me that she's very much interested in her work as a nurse."

Grace shot him a sudden look.

"I see," she observed. "She's the new type that wants to be free and self-supporting."

"Something like that," he assented.

"Well, isn't this wonderful!" said Grace, sweetly. "And besides being rich, she's so delightful. Really, Preston, it makes me believe that these things are really arranged in heaven."

"I think that's enough," he said shortly. "Of course I've only known Miss Xelva in a business way, but I've seen enough of her to make me realize that she's a very fine person, and I don't want to be joshed about her."

"Joshed?" repeated Grace. "Don't think for a

minute I'm joshing. It's all too wonderful. Why, it's like a miracle. Just the right girl for you drops out of the skies, and you fall in love with her and she with you—wedding bells and curtain. It's perfect. No wonder you can't play golf with me to-morrow."

"Suppose we change the subject," said Preston, firmly. "Speaking of other things, I met Budd as I came in. I hope you gave him a good time."

"Speaking of Budd," she answered calmly, "are n't you a little worried at having him in the same house with her?"

Preston laughed heartily—a circumstance which gave Grace a satisfaction of which the laughter was unaware.

"Yes, I'm worried," he said, "but I'm bearing up. You ought not to make me laugh that way," he added. "Poor little Budd! He is n't a bad fellow at that. You've handed it to him pretty raw, Grace. Why don't you let him go away and get over it?"

Grace's eyes flashed dangerously, but she smiled.

"I'm glad you like him."

"Of course I like him," he answered patronizingly. "Why should n't I?"

"Well, then, I'll tell you something," she went on. "There's more good in Budd's little finger

than in your whole body. You're clever and amusing, but you're cold-blooded as a fish. Heaven help the woman that marries you!"

"But why the anger?" he asked, with an astonished look. "What have I done? Wrath makes you very beautiful, but even that should n't be allowed to blind your judgment. The fish, my dear, is a model husband, clean, never in the way, never jealous. To be called a fish is a compliment. It's almost a pity you did n't decide to marry me," he added gaily. "You would have grown to prize my finny charms.

She looked at him scornfully. How could a girl, able to choose between such a man and a brave, clean, simple-hearted boy like Budd, hesitate? With a sense of alarm it occurred to her that Virginia might also have arrived at a similar conclusion.

"I suppose it is a pity," she observed, repressing the comment that was on her tongue. "However, life is full of just such tragedies."

He sighed ironically and rose.

"I must be going. Perhaps we can get some golf next week. I'll telephone if I can get a free afternoon.

"It would be nice," she said icily and bade him good night.

When he had gone Grace stood in the empty room, rigid, her breath coming fast. Suddenly, like a sleep-walker, she turned with measured steps and went up-stairs. She closed the door of her room behind her and took the telephone receiver from the hook. The number she called answered.

"Hartley," she said, "I want to speak to Mr. Budd." She waited tensely. A voice came over the wire.

"Is that you, Budd?" she asked in low, tremulous tones.

The voice, equally tremulous, assured her that it was. "Budd dear," she went on, "I was sorry not to see you just now. Can you come in after dinner?"

A stammered question was asked.

"Yes, of course I shall be alone. You'll come?"

As the answer reached her she laughed nervously.

"You dear!" she murmured. "At eight."

She replaced the receiver and sat gazing with unseeing eyes through the window that commanded the old garden. The dusk fell and deepened, and still she sat till her mother's maid knocked and asked her what she would wear for dinner.

CHAPTER XXII

WHEN Jerry turned his car toward the open country he was in much the same situation as the gentleman of the song, who with no definite idea of a terminus was "on his way." As his speed ranged from thirty to sixty miles an hour in defiance of both law and public safety, he was likely to arrive somewhere, if only in a jail or a hospital. The fact was that he was obeying a blind impulse to get away from Elmford, much as Budd had obeyed a similar impulse earlier in the day. And it was a sudden recognition of this analogy that restored to him a measure of reasonableness.

"Think of me giving the kid advice!" he muttered. "Some nerve, eh?" He laughed despite himself. When a man can laugh he has taken the first step toward getting his troubles in hand.

He eased down to forty as a maximum and continued over a lonely stretch of hill country, communing with himself upon the futility of human wisdom in general and his own in particular. As he climbed a long grade, a sudden report, followed by an ominous bumping, caused him to pull up by

the side of the road, and he got out to confront the broken tire. A prolonged period of exercise with a leaky pump stiffened his philosophy more than the new tire. If Virginia was lost to him, she was lost. Life had to go on, and the sooner he picked up the dropped stitches the sooner his individual piece of knitting would be in order. That was all there was to it. He got the tube inflated to the point where it would carry him to the next garage, put his tools away, and wiped his hands with a piece of waste. Before starting the car again, he re-read Marchbank's letter.

There was something in the fateful opportuneness of Marchy's arrival and the Wyoming project that cheered him. The universe had not overlooked him entirely. Engaged in such reflections, the possibility of running down to New York and bringing Marchbanks back to Elmford suddenly occurred to him. He looked at his watch, ran on to the next village, and, making inquiries as to his whereabouts, found that he was within twelve miles of Bridgeport. He had his tire blown up, filled his gasolene tank, and set out. A little before five he drew up before a hotel in Manhattan. Five minutes later with the assistance of a page he discovered the illustrious Marchbanks, solitary, partaking of tea and muffins in the palm garden.

Except in Latin countries, where men kiss each other, and in novels, the ceremony of greeting between long-parted friends is apt to be disappointing. Marchbanks set down his tea-cup with deliberation.

"Well, I 'll be blessed!" he observed.

"Cut out this muffin business," said Jerry, "and get a bag packed. We 'll get to Elmford for dinner. I 've got a car outside."

"Does it mean Wyoming?"

Jerry nodded, and with a regretful glance at the abandoned tea-table Marchbanks rose and followed his captor. Fifteen minutes later they were off. As they got clear of the city and sped northward, Marchbanks began a laconic recital of his adventures since the night of their parting in Lucerne.

"A simple, sordid tale," he concluded. "And now it's your turn. As I understand it, you've become a decent, industrious, country doctor."

"All of that," said Jerry.

"And still single?"

Jerry nodded.

Marchbanks yawned.

"It was a great pity you did n't stop and marry the girl with the wounded aunt. She was really a nice girl. Mildway saw her again the next day.

He was for looking up the consul and getting presented to her people. I would n't have it, though. Seemed disloyal to you. You ought to go back this winter and finish it up."

"Perhaps I will," said Jerry.

"I'm serious about it," observed Marchbanks, ducking down behind the windshield to light a cigarette. "I've changed a lot about that sort of thing—take it seriously now. Believe a man ought to marry and settle down."

"Did this occur to you on the steamer?" asked Jerry, significantly.

Marchbanks grinned.

"Well, I would n't say that; only as a general principle I'm for it."

"As a general principle it's rot!" said Jerry, savagely.

"God bless me!" said Marchbanks, looking at him in surprise. "I did n't know you were a woman-hater. Is this the result of medicine or life in Elmford?"

"It's common sense," said Jerry. Then changing the subject with some abruptness, he demanded, "What are you going to shoot with, an American 30-30 or a Lee-Metford?"

"I don't know," Marchbanks answered vaguely. "I've got a lot of stuff in my kit. I'll get you to

pick me out the right thing. But, I say, why do you announce it's common sense?"

"What else is it?"

Marchbanks gazed at him doubtfully and made no rejoinder. A moment later he tossed his cigarette away, put up the collar of his overcoat, and withdrew into his own thoughts.

The dusk had begun to fall. Jerry bent forward, turned on the headlights and, pressing his foot on the accelerator, watched the speed climb up till the indicator hung trembling close to fifty. The miles sped by. Village after village was passed and left behind. The tires held up, the engine ran like clockwork, and at half past seven the two motorists drew up before the lighted windows of the old Sumner mansion.

"We're here," said Jerry, shortly. "While I think of it, you need n't mention Wyoming till I tip you off. I have n't broken it to the governor."

Marchbanks nodded.

"Perhaps I ought to explain a little more about this expedition. Of course the shooting is to be the main thing, but you won't mind if we run down for a bit to a place called Cheyenne?"

"I think I should mind a good deal," said Jerry. "Why Cheyenne?"

"Well," said Marchbanks, with an evident effort,

"you see, that girl you spoke about my meetin' on the ship lives out there."

Jerry stopped with the latch-key in the keyhole and stared at him.

"Her people were very decent," Marchbanks went on. "Asked me to look 'em up if I was ever passing through."

"You poor mutt!" said Jerry, hopelessly. "So that 's how it is?"

"Well, something like that," said Marchbanks. "Don't think I 'm backing out about the shootin', but why can't we do both?"

"Marchy," said Jerry, soberly, "you never can do both! Cut it out. You're making the great mistake of your life. Let's switch to New Brunswick and have a go at moose."

"You 're not going to go back on me?" Marchbanks cried in alarm.

"I 'm going to take you shooting," Jerry answered, "and nothing else. When you know what I know, you 'll bless me to the end of time." With that he opened the door and ushered in his guest.

The unexpected arrival of the Hon. Marchbanks produced an atmosphere of festivity at dinner, and Jerry was grateful, although he was in anything but a festive state of mind himself. Marion ap-

peared in a new gown, and Marchbanks entertained the company with hitherto unrelated chapters of Jerry's adventures abroad. He and Marion seemed to hit it off from the start, a circumstance that kept the conversational ball rolling without assistance from Jerry. As a consequence he was able to occupy himself with his own thoughts without being noticeably distraught. One thing that perplexed him was the apparent disappearance of Bruce Gordon. He had expected to find him dining with his father.

Jerry surmised that Virginia had been directed to return to Elmford, and he was anxious to know the result of her meeting with her uncle, but as Colonel Sumner made no mention of the matter he could only wait. After dinner the three men withdrew to the library to smoke. Marion went to the drawing-room and began playing the piano. Almost immediately Marchbanks manifested signs of preferring music to male society and, laying his cigar on the ash-tray, disappeared. Shortly afterwards there issued from the drawing-room acoustic evidence of ragtime duets.

"He plays very well," the colonel observed benignly, unfolding his newspaper. "A nice boy."

"Don't judge him by his box-beating," Jerry

answered. "He's a better fellow than that. All he needs is work, and from what he tells me I fancy he's going to get it."

"I don't suppose work hurts any of us," said the colonel, with a smile. He glanced over his glasses with a look of pride at his son.

Jerry made no answer. He realized that to announce that he was leaving his newly established practice for a month's shooting was not going to be easy.

"Bruce Gordon was very much pleased at the way you have taken hold," the colonel went on. "By the way, you disappeared very suddenly after lunch. He wanted to talk to you about the hospital. You see, he had to stop over to see Virginia."

"She's come back?"

"Yes. He telephoned the office in New York. He's at Caroline Woodbridge's, dining with her. She must be rather a remarkable girl," the colonel continued. "From what he told me it seems that it was n't so much a question of whether he would accept the responsibilities of uncle as whether she would accept the emoluments of niece. Apparently she had more than half a mind to go on supporting herself with what she called her 'work.' I think Bruce was actually as nervous about making

a good impression on her as a fellow who's going to propose." The colonel laughed and began to read his paper.

Jerry rose, crossed the room, came back, and dropped into his chair again. What if the girl really did take it into her head to refuse to accept anything from her uncle? He knew she was quite capable of doing it if it seemed the right thing for her to do. If such a thing actually happened and she roused Bruce Gordon's anger, was it not more than likely that Preston would hold off? At least the probabilities would be that an immediate marriage would be out of the question. The idea seemed absurd, yet he could not help a wild hope rising again.

He began turning over in his mind a way of finding out the result of the meeting at the Woodbridges'. Doubtless by now it was all settled. Mrs. Woodbridge would know, but he could not very well ring her up and ask her.

He seized the other evening paper and forced himself to read it for ten minutes. Then he tossed it aside, rose, and got himself a fresh cigar. As he was biting off the end, he heard an automobile drive up, and stop with a creaking of brakes. It might be Gordon returning to tell of his failure. He stood breathless, struck a match, then cursed

himself for a fool. The thing he was hoping for was unthinkable, and yet— The front door-bell sounded faintly from the depths of the house. In all probability it was some friend of Marion's running in. He dropped into his arm-chair and puffed at the partly ignited tobacco. He heard the door open and then a heavy tread in the hall. The next moment the huge form of Bruce Gordon filled the doorway.

Colonel Sumner leaped to his feet.

"Well! well!" he cried, "everything all right? Sit down and tell us about it."

"I'm catching the nine-thirty to town," said Gordon, refusing a chair. "I thought I'd look in for a minute and say good night."

"Don't tell me you've been rejected?" the colonel cried, laughing.

The big man smiled grimly.

"That's a fine girl, Addison. But obstinate as—"

"As you are," suggested the colonel.

Gordon tried to scowl, but ended in a gruff chuckle.

"I tell you I've had some battle, Addison. If any one should tell you that child has n't a mind of her own, don't believe it. I would n't want her on a hostile board of directors."

"But what was the matter? Her work?"

"That was part of it. Principally though, she seems to have an unalterable objection to leaving Elmford. I'll be hanged if in the end I did n't have to compromise on letting her spend half her time here. As she's only lived here a month, I don't understand it, unless—"

"Unless what?" demanded the colonel.

"Oh, nothing," the financier answered. "We've got it patched up. I want you, though, to keep an eye on her when she's here."

"Why did n't you bring her to this house, bag and baggage?" the colonel demanded.

"You can settle that with her and Caroline," was the answer.

"We'll go down and get her this minute. I'll order the car."

"You won't have much luck to-night," said Gordon, with a wry face. "She's got a young man camping in the parlor. I suspect her interest in Elmford might be accounted for by investigations in that direction. However, it's none of my business. Good-by. I want you to come and see me the first of next week, young man," he added, with a menacing gesture at Jerry. Then he was gone.

The ragtime, which had died down with the ringing of the door-bell, started up again.

"Well! well!" said the colonel, benevolently, "is n't that splendid? Who do you suppose he meant by the young man camping in the parlor?"

"I don't know," answered Jerry and picked up the newspaper again. The drowning man's straw had gone under as, of course, he knew it would.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE counsel that the night brought to Jerry decided him to pack his kit and start west with scant explanation or ceremony. The hospital could wait. There were plenty of young doctors in Elmford who would take charge of his practice for a consideration. To his father he would plead a long-standing engagement with Marchbanks for a big-game expedition. The colonel had taken a liking to Marchbanks and would be likely to accede to the view that hospitality demanded sacrifices.

The breakfast-table gaiety of Marion and the guest appeared to Jerry unseemly, but he bore it with fortitude till Marchbanks began on a third helping of marmalade. At this point he rose and lighted a cigarette.

"I think I'll leave you children," he said, "and when you can tear yourself from this scene of gluttony," he added to the colonel, "I'd like to speak to you for a minute. I'll be in the library."

As he passed through the hall, Emile appeared in the doorway leading to the offices.

"Could you see Mr. Woodbridge?" he asked.

"He say he was sorry to come before office hour, but he was very anxious to see you."

Jerry hesitated and then turned sharply.

"I'll see him," he answered. "Bring him into my office."

As he seated himself at his desk, there was a clatter in the hall, and Budd, beaming and conducting himself much like a St. Bernard puppy with a dog biscuit, burst in.

"It's all right!" he shouted and, seizing Jerry by the hand, began to pump it up and down.

"I presume this demonstration indicates that you are open to congratulations," observed Jerry.

"It surely does," said Budd. "I came back just as you advised me to, and last night—"

"She proposed to you."

"Well, I'll be hanged! How did you know that?"

Jerry laughed.

"That must be a secret because, while ladies very often do it, they don't like to have it talked about."

"Of course she did n't really ask me to marry her," said Budd.

"Of course not," said Jerry. "And, after all, the only thing that matters is that it's done. Well, my son," he went on, "I wish you luck, lots of it and for always."

"We both of us feel as if we owed it all to you," the boy said shyly. "You 're the only person outside the family we 've told."

"Stuff!" said Jerry.

"But it 's the fact! If it was n't for that serum that went after the jealousy bugs and the good advice you gave me I guess I 'd have been in the discard by now. You 're a wonderful man, Doctor!"

"Now, look here!" Jerry began. For a moment he considered disclosing the nature of the serum and the general futility of human reason as applied to Budd's complaint.

"But there is n't any doubt about it," Budd interrupted. "It 's all due to you. You don't realize what it is to have helped a fellow out of the muss I was in. You see, very few men understand that sort of thing the way you do."

Jerry sat back helplessly in his chair. What could he say?

"I 'm glad you 're happy!" he mumbled. "She 's a fine girl."

"The best," assented Budd. He glanced at his watch and grinned. "I 'm late," he added. "She 's expecting me at ten, and I 've got to hustle down to the florist's first. This being really engaged is some responsibility!" He turned to go,

but suddenly stopped. The door had swung open, and standing in the doorway was Virginia. She looked inquiringly from one to the other.

"Am I interrupting?" she asked.

"Budd has just been telling me he's engaged," said Jerry, with an effort to be casual.

Virginia uttered an exclamation of delight.

Budd grinned.

"Of course I want you to know, Virgie," he said doubtfully, "but I really ought not to be talking to you. You see, she does n't want me to. She thinks you and I were in love with each other. That's what made her cry the other night."

"But surely you've told her!" said Virginia, somewhat anxiously.

"Of course I have, and she says she believes me, but just the same she does n't want me to see much of you."

A peal of mirthless laughter burst from Jerry.

"Is n't it the helping hand that always gets burned?" he shouted. "Of course you know it was Miss Xelva that pulled your chestnuts out of the fire," he went on to Budd. "This is a nice way to thank her for it."

"But what can I do?" Budd asked, helplessly turning to Virginia. "You wait till you're actually engaged and you'll understand all right."

Jerry's quick eye noted a deepening of the girl's color.

"Budd, I can only congratulate you and wish you every happiness, and," she added, "avoid contaminating you."

He took her offered hand, shook it gingerly, and bounded out.

When they were alone, she stood a moment in silence. Their eyes met, and then shifted their gaze.

"Well, that's settled," said Jerry, grimly. "Our first case and, I suppose, our last."

"It was very wonderful the way you treated it," she said soberly. "I confess I did n't believe you were right at the beginning, but it turned out just as you said it would. You have a very extraordinary understanding of that sort of thing."

"I'm a damned fool!" said Jerry, vehemently.

She looked at him in surprise, but a surprise that might not have carried conviction to a disinterested observer.

"I don't think I understand," she said meekly. "I feel as if I ought to apologize for questioning what you told me the night of the dance."

"You mean about love being a game?"

She nodded.

"I've been thinking a great deal about it."

"You'd better forget it!" said Jerry, savagely.
"It's all infernal rot!"

"Why, Dr. Sumner!" the girl exclaimed.

"What I told you is all stuff and nonsense," he repeated.

"But I don't understand what has changed your opinions so quickly," she said, dropping her eyes.

"Listen to me, Virginia," he began. "This love business is a serious proposition. One can't afford to play at it. I have n't any right to lecture you or to volunteer any advice, but don't make any mistake about what I've just told you."

She glanced at him from under her lashes, and a faint smile flashed in her eyes.

"Of course you're probably right," she said vaguely, "but I must n't take your time talking about such inconsequential things. I ran in this morning to get some books I'd left and to tell you something. I wanted you to be the first to know outside of Mrs. Woodbridge."

"Well?" he said desperately. He gripped the arms of the chair. It occurred to him that if he were facing a firing-squad, his emotions would be similar to those he was undergoing.

"Well," she began, "it's a great surprise. It seems that my mother's brother is Mr. Bruce Gor-

don. He's been very kind and wants me to live with him in New York."

"I know about that," he said casually. "Go on."

She gazed at him this time in an amazement that was unquestionably genuine.

"But that's all," she answered. "I feel that I ought to spend part of the year with him; at the same time I want to go on with my work in Elmford." She studied his face in the silence that followed. "What did you expect me to tell you?" she demanded.

"Nothing."

"Yes, you did," she said quickly. "What is it?"

He met her look frankly.

"Do you want me to be honest?"

"Of course I do."

"Then I'll tell you. It's only this: I want to be the first to be told when—when there is something to be told about you and Preston."

"About me and Mr. De Witt!" she cried incredulously.

"Yes."

"But, you silly man!" she burst out, "there never could be anything of that kind! You don't suppose I could take Mr. De Witt seriously?"

He stared at her, his mouth open, his mind incapable of comprehending what his ears told him. Then he rose slowly like a man recovering from a blow on the head.

"Virginia," he said huskily, "you have n't been playing this love game with me?"

"I consider that a most improper question," she answered, with mock defiance. Her eyes were shining. A mysterious radiance seemed to emanate from her and clothe her like an aureole.

"What do you mean by coming here?" he demanded.

"Have n't I a right to come to a doctor's office?" she retorted. "How do you know but what I came to get a serum treatment?" She stood before him, smiling tremulously, her eyes half closed and misty.

"Virginia, you miserable deceiver!" he cried, "you know that I love you! You've known it right along!"

She made no denial. Her mocking smile had gone. She met his look with eyes grave and tender. He went forward and opened his arms. She stood her ground, and they closed about her.

Ten minutes later they were sitting side by side upon the sofa. The first wave of passion that had

held them speechless was passing. He found his voice again.

"And there never was any Preston De Witt?" he asked.

"Never," she answered; "only you."

"God bless you!" he muttered.

"You believe me, I suppose, like Grace, but you don't want me to talk to him?" she said, laughing.

"Rub it in. I deserve it," he answered. He stopped as he heard a voice from the passage that led to the house calling, "O Jerry!"

"It's Marchbanks," he explained, "an old friend of mine. He's just blown in from England." Then he answered the hail.

A moment later Marchbanks burst in, took one look at Virginia, and stood rooted, amazement written on his countenance.

"Miss Xelva," said Jerry, "let me present my friend Mr. Marchbanks."

Marchbanks bowed low.

"This is a pleasure long deferred," he said calmly. "If I could have managed it I should have been presented that day we were fellow-travelers on the Lucerne train. Jerry, you miserable fox," he added, "how have you stage-managed this situation?"

Jerry and Virginia gazed dumfounded, first at Marchbanks, then at each other.

"Were you the girl who put her hand out and took my toothache pills?" Jerry demanded.

Virginia nodded. Without speaking, she dropped back upon the sofa again, her eyes fixed on him.

"God bless me!" cried Marchbanks, with crude, but well-meant, strategy, "I've forgotten my cigarette-case!" He darted back to the house.

"It's so strange," Virginia murmured. "That day I first came to the office I knew your voice. I thought—I thought," she went on haltingly, "it must have been that I'd known it in some other life."

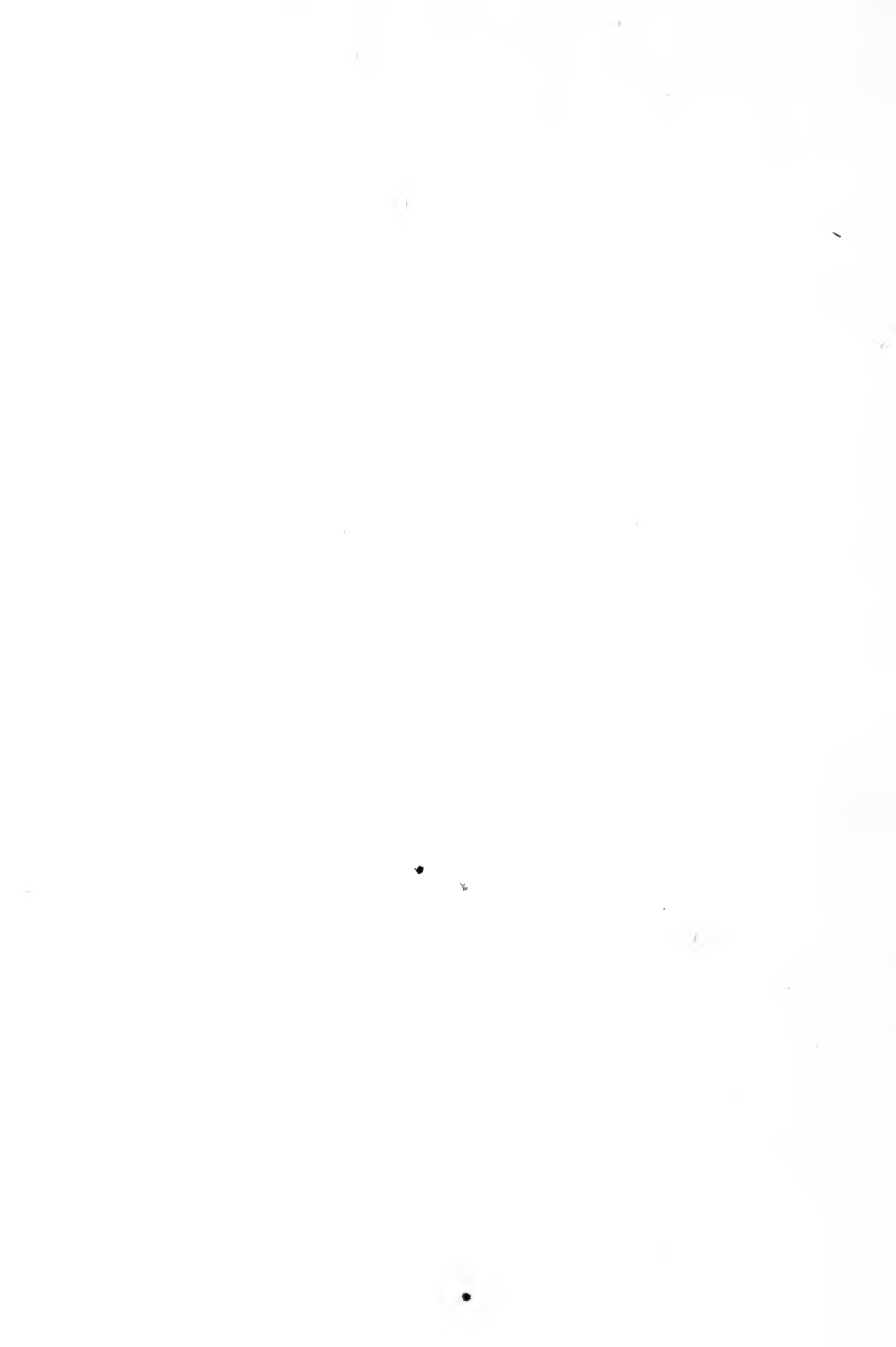
"Perhaps that, too, is so," said Jerry, soberly. "It would be no stranger. It would be much less strange, in fact. It would account for so much that no one understands." He bent down and kissed her.

Naturally there was no Wyoming expedition. Marchbanks bore the blow with a suspicious resignation, and announced that he was so charmed with Elmford that he contemplated getting a job in the plow works, which he did. Budd and Grace were married in November, and at the Yale-Harvard game at New Haven were reported en route for Eu-

rope. About the same time Preston De Witt accepted a junior partnership in New York, where his urbane talents had a larger sphere of opportunity. As for Jerry and Virginia, they were quietly married at Bruce Gordon's, and shortly afterwards installed themselves in the old house at Elmford, much to the joy of that good man and indulgent parent, the colonel.

THE END









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